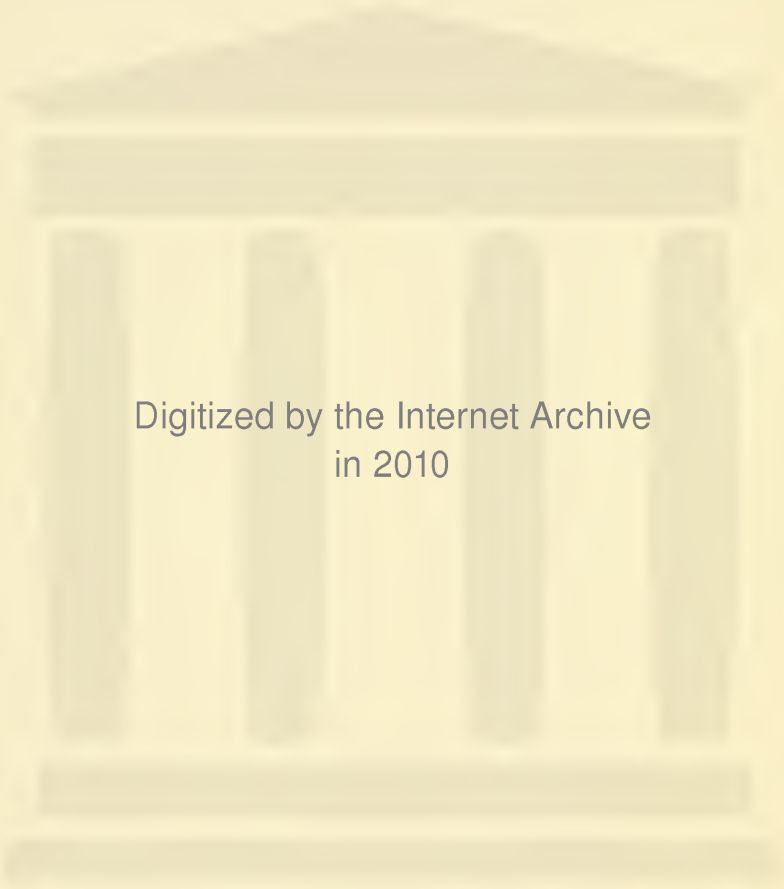
THE MYSTERY OF BURNLEIGH MANOR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BY

WALTER LIVINGSTON

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THE MYSTERY OF BURNLEIGH MANOR

CHAPTER ONE

"Burnleigh Manor —— County seat of the Earl of ———, located on the edge of a cliff overlooking the North Sea, fifteen miles N. by E. of King's Lynn, Norfolk, and one hundred and fourteen miles N. by E. of London. At one time ranked among the show places of England, it has stood empty for some years and is now in a state of disrepair.

Upon the death of Edward, it became the property of Cecil. Upon the death of Cecil it will in all probability pass from the direct line of succession for the first time in its history, inasmuch as Robert, younger brother of Edward and Cecil, disappeared over fifteen years ago, and Lord Cecil is a bachelor.

For further details, see the Register."

* * * * * * *

I GIVE you the above just as I copied it into my notes some years ago. I can also tell you that it will avail you nothing to turn to the Register. You would find, as I did, that there are no further details.

To be sure, the whole interesting history of the Burnleigh family, beginning somewhere in 1100, is there, with a great deal of furbishing and fanfares; but you will find that when the Recorder reached Edward, Cecil, and the youngest, Robert, his pen had run dry—or else he felt that what could be entered would be better left unsaid.

Figuratively speaking, Cecil Burnleigh walked into my

office with the manor tucked under his arm. There was nothing unusual in that for I was with an internationally famous firm of American architects, and Burnleigh Manor was presented to me much as the ordinary reconstruction commission. Lord Cecil seemed to be a quiet but pleasant enough old gentleman of rather indeterminate age.

It did seem to me that Lord Cecil was a bit reluctant to speak of Edward Burnleigh. Evidently the present condition of the Manor was the fault of this older brother. Cecil was perfectly frank in saying he had allowed it to run down prior to his death. Early in our conversation I learned that Edward's manner of leaving this World was a matter of quite some disgrace to a very proud family. On a Christmas Eve, sixteen years before I came into this he had died by his own hand, surrounded by what was left of his home.

Until the beginning of the reference work, of which the quotation previously given is a part, I had not heard of Robert. His mysterious and unexplained disappearance was apparently another blot on the family record which Lord Cecil found it hard to discuss. I think I dismissed these family details from my mind at this time because they formed no real part of the architectural and historical background of the old place. I was being retained by the last of the Burnleighs to restore his ancestral house to its original condition, so it was quite natural that I should consider only the architectural features. The peculiarities I began to notice in my client

I attributed to the peculiarities of his family, and I found later that, in the main, I was quite correct.

However, they did not enhance my first trip abroad. I was made comfortable enough in a suite adjoining that occupied by Lord Cecil, and for the first time in my life I knew the luxury, but rather doubtful enjoyment, of a valet. Personally I still prefer chasing my own collar buttons under beds and bureaus. Irrespective of my preferences which I was not ungracious enough to mention, my every want was ministered to by Burnleigh's own man, Glome. Odd name, that, and at our very first meeting I changed it to Gloom, a much more appropriate designation. He impressed me as the perfect model for an undertaker's assistant.

It would seem to be the height of callousness to make any complaint of a trip which one made at no expense whatever, in a luxurious suite on a fast, comfortable liner, especially when one is provided with a shadow that hovers about the entire day anticipating each wish as it is born. Ungrateful and blasé as it may seem, I can truly say that I have had far more pleasure from trips made later and under far more humble conditions. No matter how sumptuous one's surroundings are they become irksome when they constitute too steady a diet. Let me explain what I mean.

We sailed at twelve, and my luncheon was brought to me shortly after by "Gloom." On the tray with the delicious looking food was a note written in rather a shaky hand. I give it to you here:

"My dear Mr. Riker,

You may set this all down to an old man's whims if you wish, but I hope you will be kind enough to humor them. Would you mind remaining in your rooms as much as possible—in fact I would appreciate your leaving them only in the evening.

And a still heavier burden on your good nature is the request that you do not associate with any of the other passengers for the present, at least.

I hope you will pardon this seeming intrusion on your affairs until I have an opportunity to explain the reasons that seem to justify it.

Sincerely,
CECIL B.

P. S. I have taken the liberty of keeping both our names from the passenger list."

Certainly he was entitled to say what disposition was to be made of my time from nine in the morning until five at night, and when one is listening to a client with a million dollar commission, his requests with regard to the evening hours are likely to become orders inviolable.

Not that I sank back into the tufted chairs in resigned submission. As I came on board I had seen one or two very attractive young ladies and I had made quite definite, if tentative, plans for these evening hours. Instead I was to be a semi-prisoner in my rooms because of the foolish whims of an old man. I say foolish

because at this time it had not occurred to me that there might be anything of a serious nature behind them. At least I felt that my case was the first on record. There were probably many people who would like to lock their architects in far more unpleasant and hotter places than these quarters of mine, but up to the present I have never heard of it being done.

After luncheon I roamed about the suite and found on the table beside my bed quite a collection of magazines and books. On top of them lay a card. I seemed to be surrounded with correspondence if not company.

"Perhaps these will partially repay you for the part of the trip of which you have been deprived by my peculiarities.

CECIL B."

At least the old fellow was thoughtful. The periodicals were recent and diversified. After glancing idly through one or two I turned up the books and read their titles. There was not a novel among them. If and when I absorbed their contents I would be well versed in some odd phases of architecture. I cannot remember them all now, but two do stand out clearly from the rest,—Thenaud's, "Notes on the Detection of Hidden Spaces" —and Wilson's, "Studies of Ancient Architecture." These two were as fascinating as any novels could have been, and were destined to be of some assistance to me later. They were delightful companions and the first

two days were spent with them except for an occasional stolen and cautious trip to the rail for a glimpse of the sea and a snatch of sunshine.

Burnleigh was confined to his room for reasons unknown and entirely indeterminate, for the sea was a great smooth lake. I began to wonder if these chaps who had written about "the bounding main" had not been a bit facetious.

Gloom flitted in and out of my quarters, but he was far from a pleasant travelling companion. As a conversationalist he was an excellent running mate to a sphinx. I recall one of my efforts to broaden my knowledge of Burnleigh Manor with his assistance. He had brought in my dinner tray and I opened the conversation along general lines.

"Nice sailing weather, isn't it?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

I found out later that there were two words left out of Gloom's vocabulary, "yes," and "no." He avoided using them even when sailing weather was the topic of conversation on the grounds that they might be incriminating. I do not believe that in all my acquaintance with him I have ever heard him make a statement that could not, somehow, be made to point north and south at the same time. Undaunted, I tried a fresh start.

"Been across often?"

"A few times, sir."

You see? That might mean two or twenty-two.

"Have you ever been in Burnleigh Manor, Gloom?"

He stiffened as if I had touched him with a hot poker. It was only for a second, and as he relaxed and opened his mouth to speak, I knew instinctively that he had thought his way out of that one, too.

"Glome is the name, sir, begging your pardon."

With the tongs suspended over my tea-cup he turned the tide by asking a question himself.

"One or two lumps, sir?"

Ordinarily I take one lump with lemon, but with an idiotic idea of annoying him by selecting something he had not mentioned, I answered him.

"Three lumps."

His eyebrows went up a fraction of an inch which was quite a dramatic gesture for him to make, and he carefully—almost maliciously—counted out three lumps of sugar. For no good sound reason the man irritated me. He had evaded my question and I was determined he should not do it again.

"I asked you if you had ever been in Burnleigh Manor."

"Why do you ask that of me, sir?"

"Idle curiosity I suppose."

"Oh yes, to be sure, sir."

And that was that. To be sure what? I certainly was not going to humiliate myself to the extent of asking whether the "Oh yes" referred to my curiosity or to Burnleigh Manor. I thought I could get him to dis-

cuss himself a bit. The most astute and taciturn of men will become quite loquacious when afforded as fascinating a subject as themselves.

"Been in the family long, Gloom?"

I knew that I was irritating him by calling him Gloom, but this time he made a valiant effort to hide his feelings.

"For years, sir, I might say for a good many years."

With this running start I turned the conversation in an abrupt movement against his flank designed to catch him off his guard, to one point on which I really wished enlightenment.

"Then I suppose that you knew Lord Robert?"

He glanced up at me quickly and I was quite surprised at the expression on his face. It was one of the few times that I have ever seen anything on Gloom's face which could be dignified by the term "expression." It was only a flash, but when he spoke again it seemed to be with an enormous effort.

"Begging your pardon, sir, His Lordship asked me to convey his apologies to you and to tell you that as soon as he is feeling well enough he would see you. I —I hope you enjoy your dinner, sir."

With a bow and what, I suppose, was meant to be a smile, he was gone. His attitude, together with the conditions under which I was travelling, began to get on my nerves. I think it was here that I began to suspect that something more than architecture lurked in the air. The next evening my suspicions were confirmed.

CHAPTER TWO

I HAD come in from a short evening stroll. There is not a great deal of enjoyment to be derived by a young bachelor in strolling about empty decks, listening to the seductive strains of an excellent dance orchestra from somewhere below. Everything was so far from normal that I caught myself giving wide berths to the very shadowy corners that I might otherwise have been seeking, and glancing over my shoulder occasionally as if half expecting something to jump at me from each dark niche.

When I returned to my stateroom I found Gloom waiting there.

"Lord Cecil would like to see you tonight, if you would care to step into his cabin."

"Care is hardly the word, Gloom. An explanation is long since due me."

"I am repeating His Lordship's words, sir."

"Is this game of hide and seek over now?"

"I can't say, sir."

"You mean you won't say!"

"I mean I can't say, sir."

"Oh, go to the devil!"

And Gloom went. Naturally, I mean out of the room.

I tagged along at his heels for all the World like a blustering little bull pup. Without any further words he led me to Burnleigh's quarters which were duplicates of mine. As I entered, the old man looked up at me from the comfortable depths of his chair with the ghost of a smile. Smiles were a rare thing with him, and when they did come they actually seemed to be the ghosts of others that had died on his lips centuries ago, when smiling came more easily.

"Good evening, Mr. Riker. I know that I could spend the rest of the evening with apologies and not make up for your discomfort. Sit there, will you please?"

He indicated a chair across the table from him. I am afraid my replies to his preliminary remarks were not any too gracious, but being the very acme of the English gentleman he did not seem to notice it.

"It has been quite lonely for you, has it not?"

"Well, I have had better travelling companions than Gloom."

"Gloom?"

"I prefer Gloom. It is more descriptive."

Again that flicker of a smile crossed his face.

"He intimated that your solitude was beginning to be—well—a trifle irksome to you."

"He was putting it mildly."

"Putting it? Ah, yes—will you have one?"

His open cigarette case was passed across the table.

"I do not smoke cigars and I do not like them smoked in the room with me. Another whim."

When he had lighted up, he leaned forward in his chair.

"Mr. Riker, instead of expressing my gratitude to you for the splendid way you have granted my silly requests, I am going to ask you to do still another thing for me. When I have finished telling you a bit of a story tonight, you may not care to go any further. That is your privilege, but before I start I must have your assurance that what I am about to tell you will be kept a secret by you as long as I live. Will you give me your word on that?"

I did. I had reached a stage where his affairs were not of the slightest interest to me. Enticing as the restoration of an old English Manor was to my architectural heart, I regretted coming. But I have kept my word, for until Lord Cecil's death last year I have not breathed a word of the story to anyone. With my expressed assurance, he went on talking.

"By now the possibility of my being some sort of a crank has occurred to you, I suppose?"

As a matter of fact, it had not. But why not? One brother a suicide—the other disappearing off the face of the earth——

"I see it had not until I mentioned it. That was kind of you. At best, Mr. Riker, sanity is only relative. I believe I am in my right mind at the moment even if I have reason not to be——"

He was watching the smoke curl up from his cigarette,

lost in thought. With a visible start he brought his attention back to me.

"However, you will have to take my word for that. Now if you are comfortable, I will begin at the very beginning and give you all the facts surrounding this new venture of yours. First, about my family—unless you already know some of our history?"

This was an embarrassing question to answer, and I stammered out the fact that I had glanced at the Register.

"I rather imagine the Register was silent on the present generation, and—I am sorry to say—rightfully so. Suppose I introduce you to the Burnleighs? My father had three sons, in the order of our ages, Edward, myself—and Robert. My father was rather an odd type and he had two great passions in life—my mother, and Egypt. His early manhood was spent there in the diplomatic service and he knew our country as few Englishmen have ever succeeded in knowing it. My mother died when Edward was twenty-three and my father two years later, from grief."

As if to punctuate his sentence, the ash dropped from his cigarette to the floor unheeded.

"As the eldest, Edward became the head of the house. He inherited two things from my father—the finest collection of things Egyptian privately owned in the World—and his love for Egypt itself. To the former Edward added all his life, spending at least half of his

time in the country of sphinxes and pyramids. Returning from one of these long stays, he surprised us by bringing back a wife. She, too, was Egyptian—in fact she could trace her descent far back into that charming past of a vanished race. Mr. Riker, she was unquestionably the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. The entrancing mystery of the East was about her like an invisible veil and it made of her something that defies——"

He shifted uneasily in his chair and his eyes avoided mine.

"Words are inadequate and it would not help us with our story. One thing that is probably incomprehensible to you is the position of younger brothers in my country. At my father's death, all of his property and influence went to the eldest son, Edward. For myself and for Robert, the youngest, there was a mere pittance. This did not bother me in the least. I expected it and was happy in my work, but it always irked Robert. He was a handsome chap—lovable, talented, and popular. Although given to sulking on occasion, he was always welcome at Edward's home and spent much of his time there. I was by nature and occupation a wanderer and saw little of them. There was one time each year that we all gathered under one roof—that of Burnleigh Manor —and that was Christmas. We never failed to get there Christmas Eve and for a few days we would be together. Lady Burnleigh was the most charming hostess that ever

lived, and that sample of her hospitality and sweetness remained with me for the rest of the year. Then something happened to Edward."

His voice died away and he sat looking back into the past he was describing. As we sat there in silence it seemed as if something crept into our cabin. Something cold. Something oppressive. Something black and bitter tasting. Burnleigh leaned forward abruptly and took another cigarette. When the first puff of smoke was on its way ceilingward, he picked up his story again.

"I reproach myself for not knowing more about this part. I should have remained in England and tried to —to help. As I look back now I think the first warning I had of the way things were going was a letter from Robert in which he stated that practically the entire collection of Egyptian pieces had disappeared. The fact that he carefully avoided mentioning Edward's name in this connection convinced me that he felt our heritage had been sold and the funds diverted to the personal use of our older brother. Rumors reached me that Edward was changing from an hospitable, generous and brilliant man, to a morose, silent—almost vindictive caricature of his former self. Naturally it was with some trepidation that I approached the Manor on that last Christmas Eve that we ever spent together. From the very first moment my visit was unpleasant. I entered the doors of Burnleigh Manor and found my brothers in a violent quarrel that ended abruptly on my entrance. Neither one would discuss it with me or ex-

plain its cause, so I was helpless to smooth it out. During my short visit I felt a terrific tension existing in the household. Edward was taciturn and moody. Robert was unnaturally gay, reckless and charming. Underneath Lady Burnleigh's evident effort to carry things along smoothly I sensed a desire to tell me something—warn me of something that was threatening—but Edward never allowed her out of his sight. A day later I left in pique, feeling I was no longer welcome under my brother's roof. I know now that my egotism closed my eyes to the truth. The next evening the papers were full of my brother's disappearance. Robert had vanished from Burnleigh Manor the night of the day I had left. No one saw him go, nor have I ever found anyone who has seen him since. For five long years I did nothing but search for him and in all that time, or in the time since then, I have never found a trace."

An ugly suspicion flashed across my mind and I interrupted him for the first time.

"Did Edward aid you in the search? You spoke of a—a quarrel."

"He did not. You see, Mr. Riker, his wife disappeared at the same time—the same night."

He bowed his head for a second. I could understand what it meant to share this with an outsider and I began to get a glimpse of the reasons for the deep lines in his face and the white hair that seemed somehow premature.

"It seems quite clear at this point, does it not? But the Yard thought of that, too, and no stone was left

unturned that might yield evidence against Edward. It is not easy to fool the Yard, Mr. Riker. He refused to help the police, but he in no way hindered them, and in the end they gave it up. It left him a crushed man. He rarely spoke to anyone and went about like a man in a dream. So you see we really do not know what did——"

He checked himself and continued quickly.

"There is not much more to tell, so be patient. You must be frightfully bored."

Boredom was far from me at the moment!

"During my search for Robert, or in the years that followed it I never saw my older brother. Then one winter that I happened to be spending in my London quarters I received a telegram from him summoning me to spend Christmas with him. It was a bit of a shock for I had had no replies to my letters to him and it was quite common gossip that no one was welcome at the Manor. However, I left at once for what had once been our home—Burnleigh Manor."

He stopped and I noticed his face was slowly paling. From this point on I do not believe he was conscious of my presence in the cabin. He was feeling the relief of unburdening in speech a horrible memory that had been pent up within too long.

"It had been snowing for two days, but when I stepped down from the train at King's Lynn it was a clear, cold, starry night. The station was deserted. There was no sign of a waiting car, and believing that my telegram in reply had not reached the Manor I stepped over to the

Inn to secure a conveyance. I will pass over that if you do not mind, by simply saying that there was no one in the town who would drive me to Burnleigh Manor and no one who would tell me why they would not. So I walked those long, cold miles through the snow."

The howl of the wind at the port-hole and the creak of the ship as it rolled made a fitting accompaniment.

"I could never describe to you my feelings as I came toward my brother's gates. They hung open on dilapidated hinges, but not a track showed in the snow. The Lodge was dark and empty—most of its windows broken—its door standing ajar. The shrubbery had grown up in wild disarray as if nature were making an effort to hide its shame. I started up the long, winding drive. I could now hear the pounding of the sea on the cliffs beyond and below. Above the bare trees with their crooked arms the two towers of the Manor lifted themselves into the sky like two sentinels guarding the nothing that was left. Below them was the black dismal bulk of the house with not a light showing. So far there had not been a single indication that would lead me to believe that a living soul was within miles of the place. I began to wonder if the telegram had not been a hoax or a trap to lure me to this lonesome end of the World. The drive ended at the terrace steps and not a footmark marred the snow even here. As I approached the big front doors I saw that there *was* a dim light somewhere in the hall. Weary and cold, with a heart torn by grief and evil foreboding, I knocked. Nothing but hollow

echoes that reverberated across the great hall and went rambling through the gallery and the rooms above answered my rapping. Again I knocked and again only the echo answered me. Reluctantly my cold hands turned the handles and I pushed the doors open before me. There, facing me, seated at an old table piled high with indiscriminate looking refuse and with a dingy oil lamp at his side, sat my brother. His shaking hand held a revolver leveled in my direction. He was emaciated—shrunken beyond belief and sat huddled down in a pile of rugs and blankets that looked filthy. At sight of me he dropped the gun to his lap and burst out in a gale of cackling laughter.

" 'So it is you, brother dear? Come in—come in—and welcome to Burnleigh Manor! What a sorry welcome I did give you but'—he held his finger cautiously to his lips and whispered—'but I should have known that ghosts do not have to *open* doors!'

"And he gave another of those horrible cackling laughs. I realized that I was dealing with a man who was stark, raving mad—a physical derelict with an insane pilot—my own brother. I shuddered and those darting eyes of his detected it.

" 'Keep your coat on—it is cold in here—cold as the—grave!'

"It was not the cold that kept me shivering. All that had in the previous years been so bright and cheery was now cold—bitter cold and damp and evil smelling. The

great fire place that had held the blazing Yule log each year was dark and full of trash. So far I had not been able to bring myself to speak. I stood there staring stupidly at the heart-rending sight before me, conscious of the stare of his eyes that looked like the peep holes of a furnace, so glittering was the fire within him that was consuming his brain.

" 'I suppose you think I am crazy? Well, I'm not. Not yet. Perhaps I will be if they do not get me first.'

"Here was something more tangible to work on and for the first time since I entered, I spoke.

" 'If *who* does not—get you—Edward?'

" 'The ghosts. Laugh, if you wish, but you will hear them.'

"His hands that had been lying quietly over the revolver in his lap began to twitch, and he moved his head from side to side with an odd jerky motion. Stepping quickly to his side I patted his shoulder reassuringly.

" 'Do not speak of such things! There are no ghosts except those we make for ourselves. The real truth of the matter is that you are too much alone here. Where are the servants?'

"Again he gave that laugh that was weirdly devoid of mirth.

" 'They couldn't stand it. I am the only one with nerve enough to stay in this ghastly place. So there are no ghosts, eh Cecil?'

"Just then the clock struck the first note of midnight

and a look of abject terror came over my brother's face. Half rising from his chair he spoke in a whisper that ended in a shriek.

" 'No ghosts you say? Then listen—listen—LISTEN! Good God—why can't she rest?'

"The clock ceased striking and I turned quickly toward the stairs. I could hear the soft footsteps of someone descending them. Believing the dim light of the hall prevented me from seeing who it was, I stepped to the first tread and looked up. The step came nearer and nearer—the stealthy tread of someone tip-toeing down, but as yet I could see no one. I remember spreading my arms completely across the first part of the stairs in the belief that if for some peculiarity of the lighting I was prevented from viewing whoever it was, they certainly could not get past me. I heard my brother moaning in his chair. The footsteps came closer and closer and then they *passed* me and I saw and felt no one. Whoever it was had slipped by me without my arms or body impeding their progress. I followed the sound of the steps, fighting for a rational explanation of the inability of my eyes to descern the figure—across the hall—to the front door. Then Edward shrieked at me.

" 'No ghosts, eh? She walked through you—*through* you—do you hear what I say? Don't open that door! DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR!'

"Then he fell back in his chair in what I took to be a faint. Closing the door again I rushed to his side. He revived rapidly for one so terribly weakened and I be-

lieve he was entirely rational when he opened his eyes and looked up at me. It was a pathetic moment, Riker, for the look he gave me was that of a strong man hopelessly beaten—that of a man who was dreadfully, dreadfully tired.

" 'Cecil, I leave it all to you. I can go on no longer. Promise me that you will never live here, nor allow anyone else to do so. It will make of you what you see me tonight, and I know that you did not find me a pretty sight.' "

The cigarette had gone out in Cecil Burnleigh's hand. His head was bent—chin resting on his chest and at intervals a tremor would pass over him as if he were chilled. His eyes were closed and I knew that it was to keep me from seeing the pain in their sombre depths. He was forcing himself to go on now, and the words fell from his lips in a meticulously metered flow.

"Then, muffled by the rugs, there was the sound of a revolver shot and Edward's head fell forward. He had shot himself as I watched—his movements hidden by the blankets he had gathered about his shrunken frame. As I closed the doors of the Hall to go for the assistance I knew to be useless, it was with the realization that another tragedy had been added to the already too long roll against the name of Burnleigh Manor."

CHAPTER THREE

I SAT literally frozen to my chair during his recital of that last Christmas Eve at Burnleigh Manor. As I watched him I was convinced that he was not as old as he appeared, but that whatever was behind this family's disasters had laid its withering hand on him also and that it was slowly and inevitably pushing him before it. He intercepted my glance and misunderstood it.

"No, I do not want you to think I believe in disembodied spirits wandering about in the dark, Riker. I have told you honestly what happened. Something passed me on those stairs without my seeing it or feeling it, but there is some rational explanation for it somewhere. At least—but suppose I finish the little that is left of my story before we get into a psychic discussion? The next day I buried my brother and I had Burnleigh Manor boarded up so that it was impossible for anyone to enter. It has stood that way for years, at least I thought it had until I received this letter from my solicitors three weeks ago."

He handed me a letter that had been lying on the table between us, and I read it.

"Lord Cecil,—

In accordance with your instructions we have had our man living in the Lodge of Burnleigh Manor. A few days ago he reported to us that he had found footprints leading to the doors of the Manor itself, but none returning therefrom. We immediately had the boarding examined and found that it had unquestionably not been disturbed. However, wishing to be sure that your interests were fully safeguarded, we had sufficient planking removed from the front door, and entered. No one was found on the premises, but on checking with our careful inventory as of the day of closing the building, we found two volumes to be missing from the library table. We also found conclusive evidence that some one had been in the library more than once since the Manor was boarded up. There were fresh muddy footprints as well as what seemed to be dried ones of other visits. The manner of entrance and exit is a mystery to us and before taking any further steps we would like instructions from you.

Our man also reports some peculiar circumstances which we feel certain can be readily explained. Believe us when we say that it is with the greatest reluctance that this matter is brought to your attention.

Faithfully yours,
BURBECK & BRIGGS"

Burnleigh had been watching my face as I read it and the instant I glanced up he spoke.

"And so you see, Mr. Riker, we not only have someone who is able to come down a stair remaining invisible, but who can also walk through boarded windows and doors leaving footprints going in but none coming out."

The smile on his lips was not matched by the light in his eyes.

"What instructions did you give to your solicitors?"

"I asked them to make doubly sure that the boarding was secure and undisturbed. Nothing further was to be done until they heard from me. I have not communicated with them since that time."

I laid the letter back on the table.

"These—these peculiar circumstances mentioned in the letter—what were they?"

"Inasmuch as I took steamer for your country a few days after I received that letter I know nothing about it."

He leaned toward me over the table and his eyes had an arresting glitter.

"Mr. Riker, as long as Burnleigh Manor slept quietly, I was content to let it sleep. It would seem as if it had laid down its challenge once more—these events have a mysterious undertone—and I, as the last of the Burnleighs, do not intend to let it go unanswered. That is where you enter the affair—if you wish."

It impressed me as a typical case for one of the superhuman, master-mind individuals so prevalent in our mystery novels today, rather than a task for a person specializing in the rebuilding of ordinary houses into hab-

itable homes. I said as much, and was met with a slow shake of the head.

"Off hand it might seem to be a job for Scotland Yard, but I know it is not. While I have not been near the Manor since the day it was boarded up, it has been a rare moment when it has not been on my mind. The more thought I have put on it the more firmly have I become convinced that the explanation of everything that has seemed so—unusual—lies in that old house itself. It was there, dormant, for anyone who searched to find. Now it is not dormant—it is alive again. I intend to answer its challenge by myself if necessary. The issue is between that building and myself—a building that holds a secret I now want to know—a structure of stone and mortar with a definite personality to me. Is it not natural then, that I should secure the assistance of a man who knew houses—who could at a glance tell more about its character and construction than I would know after years of study?"

He sank back in his chair and his fingers drummed nervously on its arm. I knew he was not through speaking so I held my peace.

"I also wanted someone who was young and who was not steeped in the traditions and the legends of the place. I wanted someone who will, if necessary, tear it stone from stone until it yields its secret—or until it is proven that I am an old man with foolish notions and a perfectly normal ancestral home. Above all, I need a man

of courage who can look peculiar things in the face and explain them away naturally and rationally."

The last half hour had certainly changed the complexion of the whole affair to a remarkable degree. I was still in a sort of haze into which the story I had just heard had plunged me. How did I know that I could handle any such commission as this weird one? I could certainly take a house apart for him "stone from stone" with a certain amount of intelligence but——

"I think I can understand your viewpoint, Lord Cecil, and yet houses do not make muddy footprints—nor do ghosts for that matter, although my experience in that line has been decidedly limited. I am still of the opinion that you can find better hands than mine to help you."

He looked at me for a moment or two through the smoke of a new cigarette, and then nodding his head as if satisfied on some point he had been considering, went on.

"With equal logic I might point out to you that people do not walk into an ordinary house that is securely boarded up, leaving tracks of their entrance, but no outgoing ones. I do not wish to urge you in the least, for I have no way of knowing what I am asking you to get involved in, but please bear in mind that the Yard has had its chance and retired without throwing light on the matter. I am now convinced it was because they confined themselves to *people*. If you will recall it was the Manor that my brother warned me against—not any living person. I intend to find out all there is to know

about the Manor, and then rebuild into it the closest approximation of its former splendor that your judgment recommends."

He exhaled a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"And I hoped that you might be interested."

It was hardly a question of interest and I told him as much. I was fascinated by the whole aspect, but the realization of just what I had been employed to do bowled me over somewhat and left me rather skeptical of the entire commission. His assurance that in any case the place was to be rebuilt brought back some of my enthusiasm. There was an obstinate doubt in my mind of the legitimacy of the affair and I decided to clear up one point that did not seem to fit in with the explanations to date.

"If you are so certain that the explanation of it all lies entirely with the house, why all the secrecy in connection with this trip? You do not expect Burnleigh Manor to spy on us here on the boat, do you?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"Hardly, and I am delighted that you brought it up. It indorses my judgment in selecting a technically trained mind accustomed to looking at facts squarely and analyzing them. I most certainly have not permitted myself to go to the extreme of feeling that I am being watched by the Manor, nor do I feel that it made the footprints. I do not believe my brother was alone in the house the night he killed himself even though he was so sure of it himself. Someone besides ourselves is interested in

what the old place holds. Their interest is a compelling one, for on the gates is a sign informing all trespassers that the deputy stationed there has received orders to shoot on sight. Their errand cannot be even partially legal or they would have applied to me for permission to enter. I have had other indications that I will tell you about later. It is relatively certain that I was followed on my trip over—at least to the boat. I wished to be certain that I was not being followed back before we were seen together or our identities known to the other passengers. I preferred that our mission at Burnleigh Manor be unknown to any competitors we might have until the last possible moment. So I 'hid my threat' as you Americans say, in a stateroom until I felt it was safe to bring him out. From now on the ban is lifted."

That certainly was plausible enough to satisfy anyone. I even was conscious of a feeling of irritation that anyone was to lay hands on the place before I could get at it. The realization that they had a clear field at the present moment was especially annoying. Burnleigh's face was expressionless. He was watching for my reaction.

"Well, your competitors seem to have somewhat of a head start."

He nodded quickly.

"Indeed, yes. They seem to know a lot about the place too, but if they had found that for which they were searching they would not be returning now. One thing over which I have pondered and which still re-

mains a puzzle to me, is the fact of their silence and inactivity for all these intervening years."

As he wearily leaned toward me I noticed for the first time the tremendous cost of his narration. His face was chalk white and his eyes had sunken into his head.

"Perhaps you would like to think this over quietly by yourself, Mr. Riker, and let me have your decision in the morning. There are two days more before we dock."

My answer to that was a surprise to myself.

"Not at all. I haven't the least idea of backing down. Frankly I think it is much ado about nothing, and I am anxious to begin the reconstruction work."

He was unquestionably delighted and relieved by my attitude and proffered me another cigarette as a tacit invitation to stay with him a bit longer. As a matter of fact I had no desire to go back to my cabin. I am the sort of person that reads a "thriller" with a supercilious and tolerant smile and with much mental "tush-tushing" and then leaps wildly out of his chair with hair literally on end when the clock strikes. I much preferred sitting with him and discussing the necessary details and plans of procedure to returning to my empty cabin that would surely be dark.

It was the "wee small hours" when we said goodnight and I was much too tired then to do anything but crawl into bed and sleep soundly. However, I was somewhat chagrined and much ashamed to find, when I awoke the next morning, that I had left the light burning in my cabin all night!

CHAPTER FOUR

I saw very little of Burnleigh during the rest of the voyage and we did not discuss the Manor except that I was given to understand that from now on the matter rested entirely in my hands. I turned all of the odd details over in my mind many times and either the repetition or the bright sunlight gradually robbed the whole affair of everything but the expectation of the renovating work.

For a few days after we landed I was left almost entirely to myself while Burnleigh tended to certain matters needing his attention. I decided to reconnoitre "on location" and dispose of the owner's suspicions before taking out any real labor staff, so I confined my efforts in that direction to listing all possible sources. I also arranged for the necessary materials and supplies so that when the need arose I could secure them promptly. Then I spent two delightful days sightseeing.

After supper on the fifth evening of my stay on British soil we started for Burnleigh Manor. At my hotel the chauffeur turned Lord Cecil's big Rolls over to me and disappeared into the night. We had selected the evening for the trip so that we might arrive at the Manor

without attracting any more attention to our arrival than was unavoidable.

It was a delightful night—cool and fresh—and as I climbed under the wheel Lord Cecil took the seat beside me. In the tonneau sat Gloom and beside him an elderly man, evidently another servant of some kind, whom I had not seen before.

Swinging the car from the curb I let it spurt down the semiquiet street of my hotel. As I glanced back before turning the corner I caught a fleeting glimpse of Gloom sitting bolt upright in the back seat, and the humor of the situation gave me an irresistible impulse to laugh. Burnleigh turned an inquiring and surprised glance my way.

"I have been told that you Americans are noted for a peculiar sense of humor likely to break out in unexpected places, but would you mind telling me what there is about this particular trip that even borders on the amusing?"

Turning partially about in my seat to be sure that the glass partition between it and the back tonneau was closed so that our conversation could not be heard by those in the rear seat, I lowered my voice and answered him.

"I was just wondering how it felt to Gloom to have a driver and a man on the box—the man on the box being an English lord, no less!"

I have never heard Lord Cecil laugh, but I think he

was very close to it at that moment. His reaction to my remark, however, was typically English.

"I say—I never thought of that. You don't mind it —driving I mean? I thought it would be best if my chauffeur was left out of this thing entirely and so——"

I assured him that I did not "mind" and kept my thoughts to myself while we threaded our way through the city and suburbs. When we had cleared traffic and were out on the open country road I let the Rolls out a little, trusting that I would not frighten Burnleigh, yet hoping that I would throw a bit of a scare into the imperturbable Gloom who could not possibly see from where he sat what lay ahead of us in the darkness. Fully an hour passed with the lovely old trees rushing past us on both sides and with the soft evening air pressing against our faces. The English countryside is blessed with a thousand lovely perfumes at evening.

I thought Burnleigh had dozed off but after we had flashed through a tiny village with its lighted inn he stirred at my side.

"You drive beautifully, Riker."

I thanked him for the compliment and wondered to myself what else a person could do with a car like his. I thought of telling him about the rather ancient contraption that I managed to get about in back in the States. There was some question in my mind as to his sense of humor appreciating it so it was he who opened the conversation again.

"Does it annoy you to have some one talk to you while you drive?"

I assured him I would thoroughly enjoy it.

"I thought I might tell you about the other man I have in the tonneau. His name is Hooper and he is the man I think I told you about—the one that served my brother Edward. I believe he was the last one to leave my brother—in fact I am not sure he ever really left him. Naturally he knows the Manor quite thoroughly. It is doubtful if we can get him to enter the place again, but he can stay at the Lodge with us and probably be a source of useful information. He is a most taciturn person and especially so concerning things that happened prior to Edward's death. As a stranger you will find it hard to get him to answer your questions, perhaps, but I will always be there to help you. With the man now living at the Lodge, you, myself, Gloom and Hooper, we will have quite a staff for a start."

I kept my own opinions of the staff to myself. Unless the man at the Lodge was of a decidedly different stamp from our two passengers on the back seat, I could not see what good any of them were going to be to me.

For a time we sped along a straight and open road at an outrageous speed and the conversation consisted of small bits snatched against the wind. Then we slowed for another sleepy little hamlet and Burnleigh started again.

"Do you know anything of the coast we are approaching?"

I frankly admitted my geography was reputably weak.

"It is not geography to which I refer, but rather history."

English history was, as I remembered it, the name of one of the courses through which we snatched the necessary sleep to sustain us for the more arduous ones. Things like that are still done at technical colleges I believe. Engineers are therefore not expected to do anything but look embarrassed when asked a question such as Lord Cecil's.

"I was not trying to quiz you, Riker, I merely thought you might be interested in hearing something about its traditions. The Manor stands on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. It was to this coast that the pirates of olden days came for safe harbor. Some of the little coves and points still bear the names of these ancient buccaneers and while I have never seen any such thing, I have been told that there still exist in a fair state of preservation some of the elaborate caves and underground chambers used for the storage of their loot. According to the natives the point on which the Manor was built was at one time a pirate stronghold, although any discernible trace of such a thing has long since disappeared. I never heard my brother mention anything in this connection so I imagine it is all like so many of these myths of the north coast—the active imaginations of local natives for the edification of tourists. While you are here you might try to pry about a bit."

The prospects sounded interesting but I had other

things to occupy my mind, for the road was getting narrower and more winding and it seemed to me that my guide was not so sure of his direction. We could not afford to get lost as it was getting late and the little towns we passed through were dark and their streets deserted. At a fork, Burnleigh hesitated a moment and then indicated that I was to take a wickedly twisting bit of road up a hill. At the top the trees thinned out and as I came over the brow, he laid a hand on my arm and I brought the car to a stop.

"Down there in the valley is King's Lynn. Dip down over the hill and then if you will take the next right fork we will avoid the town entirely and strike a back road leading out along the cliffs."

A dog barked down in the valley and the wind swept up with a new chill. An answering howl from another dog on the far side of the town came down the wind to us and I shivered involuntarily. There was nothing so different in the spot from a hundred other dark and sound asleep towns through which we had passed, but it brought to me a sudden depression. Perhaps it was the knowledge that over beyond that dark line of hills sat that house of the weird tale, Burnleigh Manor. One thing was evident. I was not the only one to feel the peculiar chill, for conversation ended as I put the car in gear for the ascent.

At the fork I turned as directed and after we had gone a little distance I smelled the salt air from the sea and imagined I could hear the sound of the surf against

the cliffs over the soft, reassuring purr of the motor.

We were literally crawling along a bumpy clay road that must have been wicked after a rain. The wood was quite dense on both sides to us and consisted mostly of short, twisted, wind-blown trees. The night air from the sea was really cold now and I felt Burnleigh shiver.

"Are you cold? Would you like to stop a moment?"

He shook his head with his eyes fixed on the road ahead. For a moment I thought he did not hear me. Then he shook his head again and answered in a hushed voice.

"It was not the cold, Riker. Around that bend ahead are the gates of Burnleigh Manor."

I had brought the car almost to a stop and now I could hear very distinctly the moan of the surf and the whistling of the wind through the bare, scrubby trees. I glanced sidewise at him and saw that his head was bent forward as if making an attempt to pierce the darkness between ourselves and that bend. I could understand his feelings and so I sent the car lurching ahead at the imminent risk of a broken spring. As I swung around the curve we saw the first light that had been visible to us for over an hour.

The car's headlights shone on a pair of great, wrought iron gates, and just inside them were the gleaming windows of the Lodge. Burnleigh slumped back in his seat with what sounded like a sigh of relief. Apparently he had been half expecting something besides the cheery lights to greet him.

"Sound your horn, Riker."

I did and almost immediately the gates swung open. We were expected and someone had been waiting just inside them. Driving the car through them I brought it to a stop at the door of the Lodge. A clang of metal on metal behind us told me that Burnleigh Manor was once more closed to the World.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gloom climbed stiffly out of the tonneau and assisted Lord Cecil to alight. Hooper busied himself piling our luggage on the ground close to the door of the Lodge. I switched off the headlights and snapped on the side ones and took a quick survey of the Lodge.

It was a compact stone affair designed by a man who did not have to think of expense. Even in the dark it was apparent that it had been a little gem in its time. Not that it was in a state of collapse now—it had been much too well built for that—but I could see little indications here and there of a run down condition. However, my eyes were trained for that sort of thing and to anyone else it might have seemed a delightful home for an American suburb just as it stood. From an architectural viewpoint it was vastly superior to our suburban atrocities committed in the name of England. The man whose work I was to rehabilitate had been an artist and I confess to a qualm of uncertainty.

My examination was cut short by the appearance of a man who stepped into the circle of light from the car.

"Good evening, my lord. We have everything in readiness for you!"

Burnleigh turned and stepped nearer to the car.

"That is very kind of you. Here I am, Lowry—Mr. Riker, this is Captain Lowry. Mr. Riker is the gentleman who is to assist me with the changes I plan in the Manor."

He acknowledged the introduction to me with a stiff, quick bow and a pleasant smile. I was quite surprised to find a man of Lowry's stamp out here in this gloomy, forsaken place. He had a refined and intelligent face and I liked him at sight. He was possibly forty-five or fifty years old, but with a military bearing that made an accurate estimate difficult. While he was not very tall, he was stocky and closely knit and gave the impression of great physical strength. A shock of snow white hair was brushed back from a rather scholarly forehead. His moustache was full and just as white. His glance was direct and honest and I felt I had my first real assistant in him. He ushered us into the Lodge, talking as he went.

"My daughter keeps house for me now, Lord Cecil. She is getting tea and biscuits for you now. We thought it might be refreshing after the long ride."

Burnleigh very evidently appreciated his thought.

"While I make it a practice never to eat at night I could thoroughly enjoy some tea. It is very thoughtful of you both. It must be rather nice having her out here with you."

"Yes—quite."

I thought I detected a note of uncertainty in Lowry's voice.

"And she is well?"

"Yes and no, sir. I think the loneliness out here is not too healthy for a young girl. I think she has come to brood too much over the peculiar legends that unfortunately surround the Manor."

He held the door open for us and we entered the Lodge. Gloom and Hooper had disappeared upstairs with the luggage. A great log fire was burning in the fireplace, and we automatically settled ourselves before it. The fireplace was tremendous—at least six feet across and it had wide stone pillars at each side. Above, a broad mantel of hand hewn wood carried a heavy load of interesting looking trinkets. On a level with the mantel, and circling the entire room was a panelling in some dark wood that I could not seem to identify. Across the ceiling were hand hewn beams of ancient vintage and of the same color as the panelling. The windows were of the casement type with small, leaded, diamond shaped panes.

The comforting glow of the fireplace was augmented by the cozy light from lamps artistically scattered about the room. Miss Lowry had good taste. I snuggled down before the fire in perfect comfort. There was certainly nothing of the much heralded weirdness in the appearance of this "homey" spot. I was destined to change my mind shortly.

Edith Lowry came in with a tea tray laden with delicious looking biscuits and intriguing marmalade jars. I had an instant and firm conviction, that ghosts or what

not, I was going to enjoy this visit. She was simply lovely and the sort of person you classify as "interesting looking." Dark wavy hair framed a face that was almost unnaturally pale. Her eyes were either a very deep brown, or black. The only color in her face was the red of her lips. Perhaps they only seemed so vivid because of the whiteness of her skin.

She acknowledged our greetings graciously if coolly and at once set about pouring tea. I appointed myself waiter with one wary eye on the stair to wave Gloom back if he put in an appearance, but not until she passed me my own cup did she glance up. Only for a moment did her glance cross mine and the expression I saw in her eyes puzzled me.

I thought I detected something very much like fear in them before they dropped and a certain disturbing quality that could have passed for animosity. I may not be handsome, but I am certainly no ogre to look at and as far as I could remember I had done nothing to frighten anyone. As far as she was concerned I had set out to be especially nice.

I found out later that my efforts along these lines afforded the others some amusement. They certainly netted me nothing, for excepting monosyllabic replies to my questions—or an occasional fleeting and very reluctant smile—I might just as well have been back in the United States. Patiently I waited for the tea ceremony to be over with the idea of settling down into a conversation with her, but when it was finished she rose

abruptly and left us. Captain Lowry watched her go and then spoke to Burnleigh with an occasional amused smile in my direction.

"She is an odd girl, sir, keeping mostly to herself. She has always been a bit that way, but more so since she came out here. She likes to roam through the woods both in the day time and at night. I can't say I like the night prowling out here, but she is absolutely fearless and I don't like to deprive her of anything that gives her pleasure because she is so far from her friends. It is a frightfully lonesome life for her."

Burnleigh tossed a cigarette into the burning embers.

"Can't you send her to the city now and then, Lowry? I will be delighted to get some one to keep house for you both."

"That is very kind of you, sir, and when she first came here she did run back and forth. Lately I cannot get her to leave the grounds themselves. For some reason, I do not like it either."

I remembered the fear in her eyes and took a hand in the conversation myself.

"What do you mean by saying you do not like it, Captain Lowry?"

He turned to face me and with a shock I saw that the same peculiar look of fear was in his eyes.

"Since the day we found the footprints—ah! I am sorry, Lord Cecil!"

"Perfectly all right, Lowry. Mr. Riker knows every-

thing there is to know and is to be told everything that has come to your attention."

He turned back to me with an expression of relief.

"As I was saying, then, since we found the footprints, she has developed almost a passion for remaining close to the place. I can never seem to find why."

"Probably detective minded, Lowry and she——"

And then happened the first of the peculiar events that marked my acquaintance with Burnleigh Manor. Hooper came slowly down the stairs—which were at my right as I sat facing the fire—and stood respectfully waiting to catch Lord Cecil's attention as soon as he should finish speaking to Lowry. At the same moment Edith Lowry reëntered the door on the first floor through which she had gone—also to my right—and I saw that she had donned a small chic hat and a warm looking coat.

The rest of us of course were sitting with our legs stretched out before us facing the fire, and remained so at her——

"Please do not get up. I am going right out."

That left Hooper and Miss Lowry, alone, in a position to see the windows at our backs. My eyes were on Edith the whole time the others were speaking. Not because I suspected anything at that time, but because she was mighty easy to look at. First I heard Lord Cecil say,

"What is it, Hooper?"

She was drawing on her gloves and I did notice that she seemed to be staring fixedly over my shoulder.

Either the comfortable heat of the fire or my lack of appreciation for the intensity of her gaze kept me from investigating the matter.

Suddenly I saw her eyes dilate. Their expression is rather hard to describe. My impression was that they had seen something not unexpected and something that frightened her. It was like the look a mother has in her eyes when her child suddenly dashes across a busy street. The hand that had been smoothing down her glove went up in a natural enough gesture—apparently to adjust her scarf—but it hesitated a second on the way. That hesitation might have been one of two things. It might have been a warning or it might have been a singling out indication to someone. If it was the latter, I uncomfortably realized, it had pointed at me. Remember that it was only the fraction of a second and if I had not been coached so thoroughly to expect unusual things to happen, I should have never noticed it at all. I did not turn even then, for Hooper was speaking.

"Your rooms are ready, sir, but I am at a loss to know what to do with the peculiar contents of one of Mr. Riker's trunks. It seems to contain——"

Hooper's eyes had strayed over my shoulder, too, and as he stopped speaking he took an involuntary step backward and gasped as if for breath. His face was contorted with fear.

"There he is!—there at the window!—Oh my God——"

His eyes closed as if to shut out the sight—his hands

clenched at his sides—he swayed for a moment like a tree in the wind and then pitched forward in a faint, striking the floor with a sickening thud. I saw Lowry dash for the door. Burnleigh leaped to his feet and faced the windows. In the midst of the confusion Edith Lowry knelt by old Hooper's side on the floor. As I dropped down beside her I noticed that her hands were trembling so she could not loosen the old man's collar.

CHAPTER SIX

After a moment or two of frantic effort on our part Hooper's eyes fluttered open and he attempted to rise. A glance at our faces bending over him reassured the old man and his head dropped back on the pillow I had made of my coat.

Captain Lowry stepped through the front door and Burnleigh rose to meet him.

"I did not see a sign of anyone, Lord Cecil. What do you——"

Edith Lowry sent a quick glance at her father. It had something furtive in it and she seemed immensely relieved at his news.

"It isn't likely that there would be anyone within miles of us here, father, and the gates are locked."

Burnleigh was not convinced.

"Hooper saw something. I think that was perfectly evident."

He leaned down over the old man and spoke soothingly.

"Didn't you, Hooper?"

A feeble nod answered him.

"What was it, Hooper?"

When Hooper answered it was almost a whisper.

"If you please, sir—not tonight—not just now, at least."

Then, in an undertone, I spoke to Edith Lowry.

"You have a strong grip for a girl, Miss Lowry."

She glanced down and saw that she had been holding my finger prisoner in a fold of Hooper's coat clasped in her hand. When Burnleigh had asked his question of Hooper, her grip had tightened until her knuckles had shown as white dots on the back of her hand.

She drew it away now as if the old man's coat had suddenly burned her fingers and her eyes met mine. There was that flash of animosity again, but back of it I thought I detected a frightened appeal. Rising quickly, she stepped toward the fireplace.

Our quick exchange of glances and my one remark had gone unnoticed by the others. Burnleigh gave Hooper a reassuring pat as the old man rose with my assistance.

"Perfectly all right, Hooper. Go up stairs and get some rest."

Wearily he climbed the stairs and I noticed that he carefully kept his glance from the windows. I knew there was nothing there now for I kept them in view at all times. We all stood watching him go and I was the first to break the silence.

"I don't think we should just let it rest at that, do you? He must have seen some prowler."

Lowry answered me.

"Or thought he did. There were no footprints under

any of the windows and I went out so quickly I should have heard anyone running."

There was really no malice behind my next remark although it might have seemed so to the others.

"Perhaps Miss Lowry can help us. She was looking at the same window I think and I have a feeling she, too, saw something."

She wheeled about to face me with her back to the other two, and I was badly jolted by her expression. Her face was deathly pale, her teeth bit cruelly into her underlip, and her eyes literally flashed. In them was a kaleidoscope of emotion—fear—anger—appeal—desperation, but her voice was so steady and cool that it would betray nothing of what was passing through her mind to those behind her.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Riker. I was not looking at the window."

Somehow it hurt to have her tell such a deliberate lie. My face must have shown my feelings, but she diagnosed it incorrectly. To her it probably seemed that I was nonplussed by her reply, and for a second her lips curled in a smile tinged with sarcasm. The lie was enough—the smile was too much and I felt my cheeks flush.

"I happened to be watching you at the moment and I was quite certain by your expression that——"

Her answer cut me short.

"An imagination like that is not a healthy thing to have around here, Mr. Riker."

Turning to face the others she continued.

"If you will be kind enough to excuse me now, I will take my usual walk."

The door closed behind her at one o'clock in the morning for her "usual evening walk"! This might be a crazy place with crazy people in it, but that was too much. If she had asked me to go with her that would have been—but she hadn't. I looked at Lowry.

"Isn't it pretty risky for a young girl to be out alone at this hour of the morning, Captain Lowry?"

Outside I heard the little gate at the end of the flag stone walk slam with entirely unnecessary violence. Her father smiled at me good naturedly and I knew that he misunderstood my feelings completely. Perhaps he understood them better than I did myself!

"It is her custom, Mr. Riker, and I could not let her go until after you and Lord Cecil had arrived. While it is lonely here it is not a neighborhood where one is likely to meet anyone else."

He shrugged his shoulders and I understood the impotency behind the gesture. Burnleigh stirred in his chair before the fire.

"Hooper did not seem to find it as you describe it."

Lowry nodded.

"I suppose in view of that I should have prohibited her going out tonight. She is quite head-strong, Lord Cecil, and equally confidant of being able to take care of herself."

I certainly could believe she was head-strong. The

lift of her chin when she had so coolly told that little lie about the window—the way she carried on in spite of that turmoil deep in her eyes—the frank and open way she indicated her disapproval of something about me—all these things gave evidence of that. In my first few moments about the premises I had succeeded in getting off to an abominable start with the one person with whom I wished to be at least friendly. If I knew the reason for it the situation would have been more bearable. I went back over my remarks one by one in an effort to locate what had caused the light of almost enmity that came into her eyes from time to time when they met mine.

There was another light in her eyes that puzzled me still more—that haunting look of fear. Lovely eyes like hers had no right to harbor a thing like that. It was some comfort to recall that this was something for which I was not responsible. At least I was not the only one—or thing—that called it forth. Her eyes had held it when they looked over my shoulder at that window. Burnleigh broke in on the meditation that seemed to have enveloped all of us.

"I would give a great deal to know just what it was, or whom it was that gave old Hooper such a shock."

If I knew that, the reason for the expression in those black eyes would be explained.

"Perhaps Hooper will tell us now."

Burnleigh shook his head.

"Hooper has been almost insane with fear since we

left London. To push him before he is ready would be very dangerous. That is why I permitted him to go to his room tonight without finding out. Surely you realize that I wanted very much to know what it was at the moment of the—the occurrence."

It struck me that the answer to our question was more important than Hooper's feelings, but Lowry spoke before I could declare myself.

"Is it not barely possible that the reputation of the place had worked on his imagination to such an extent that he only thought he saw something—a sort of hallucination?"

Again Burnleigh shook his head in negation.

"But you said yourself, Lord Cecil, that he was almost insane with fear since you left London."

"However I failed to tell you two other things, Lowry. One is that Hooper has as much imagination as a cricket. The other is that he knows more about this place than any of us here tonight. He was here ten years prior to, and as far as I know, at the time of the tragedy of my brother's death."

Silence settled down once more and we each were absorbed with our own thoughts. I confess that mine strayed out into that chill and black night, wondering just where that slip of a girl was and what she was doing. At last, as if delivering an undisputable fact arrived at after exhaustive thought, Burnleigh spoke.

"No, Lowry. Someone looked in that window. Someone Hooper knew and feared."

Lowry went back to his pipe smoking without answering. For quite some time there was no sound in the room but the crackling of the fire and the wail of the wind rushing through the trees outside. No one seemed to want to turn in and I frankly admit that I dreaded the thought. Finally Lowry reached forward and knocking the ashes out of his pipe on the stone hearth spoke as if relieving his mind of a weighty matter, carefully thought out.

"Now that your Lordship has arrived accompanied I should like permission to leave."

Burnleigh started and sat up.

"Leave! Leave me now? For heavens' sake—why?"

"To be frank, sir, I do not like the way things are going."

"But you said not a moment ago that your daughter——"

"She will have to come whether she wishes to or not. I owe it to her to tear her away."

This was not to my liking one bit.

"But Lowry, you have been here for—for quite a few years without complaining."

"And for years we were happy here. Recently it has not been—well it has not been the same."

"You refer to the footprints mentioned in the letter I received from my solicitors and perhaps this evening's occurrence?"

"Only in so far as they mark the beginning of my troubles."

"Which have been—what, for instance?"

Lowry shifted uneasily in his chair, his eyes fixed on the fire.

"They are not the sort of things that it is easy to talk about, just so, sir—not easy to describe."

I marvelled at Burnleigh's persistence. I had never seen a trace of it in him before and I wondered if it was the desire to convince Lowry to remain, or the desire to hear what had happened to make him wish to leave, that prompted it.

"But, Captain Lowry, don't you think we should be told these things if we are to remain here?"

"There is something in that, sir, but my daughter is so opposed to my telling any of it. She did not wish me to mention even the footprints."

Burnleigh glanced across at me as if to indicate that this was a matter for me to take up, but I held my peace.

"Why should she feel that way?"

"Partly because she felt you would not believe us."

"Why should I not believe there were footprints?"

Lowry ignored his question.

"And partly because she thinks people will say we, too, have become superstitious about the place."

Burnleigh urged him on.

"And partly——?"

"Well, the other part is my main reason for wishing to leave. I do not like the effect the place is beginning to have on my daughter. There is—is some change that

I do not understand, and as I said, I certainly do not like."

It was evident that Lowry had thought the matter over and was quite decided in his own mind. His leaving would be a blow to me, for I should lose assistance I had already come to rely upon, and I should also lose my chance to make friends with my lady of the mysterious eyes. When Burnleigh spoke again I saw that he too, had recognized the firmness of the man's decision.

"I shall be sorry to see you go, for I know we both counted on your help, but I can understand only too thoroughly that it is not a healthy place for a young girl. Would you mind if I asked you again to tell me something of what has happened to upset you?"

This time there was something of a command in the older man's voice. Lowry leaned forward and laid his pipe on the edge of the hearth and then settling back, with his gaze still fixed on the glowing embers, he began his puzzling narrative.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOWRY spoke slowly, and it seemed to me, rather reluctantly.

"I will give you one example of the sort of disturbing things that have been happening recently. Two weeks ago last night, I retired quite early. As I was going in to bed, my daughter passed me on her way out for her walk. I asked her why she was taking her exercise so much later at night these last few weeks, and she told me that she loved the sound of the surf on the cliffs when it was too dark to see it."

Burnleigh nodded.

"Odd, but wholly understandable."

"Possibly. I was awakened first by her return. I heard her lock the front door and go into her room which as you probably know is on this first floor, over there."

He pointed to a door about six or seven feet from the fireplace and to the right of it.

"I had just about dozed off again when I heard—or else dreamed that I heard the soft call of an owl. I listened intently for a few moments, and I heard it again. It seemed to come from the foot of the stairs there."

He indicated the stairway to the right of us. The

stairway was a boxed in arrangement and mentally I made a note that a sound made anywhere in the room would probably sound as if it was made on the stairs to anyone up above.

"Now sir, the call of an owl is not.a sound one expects to hear this season of the year and certainly not *in* the house. I lay in bed for a moment wondering whether I was awake or just dreaming when I heard a soft tread in this room that was not made by any bird—and what was more—was not made by my daughter. I arose quickly and as quietly as I could—secured my revolver and crept to the head of the stairs. The room was quiet except for the rustling of paper. It sounded much as the pages of a book sound when a wind is turning them rapidly. I came down to the turn, up there, and from there I could see the entire room. In front of the fireplace—just about where Mr. Riker is sitting—a man was resting on one bent knee, examining something in the dying light of the fire. It seemed to be a book for he would turn a leaf or two and then hold it over closer to the embers for light."

Lowry sank back deeper into his chair and hunched his shoulders as if he were cold.

"I stole down the rest of the stairs as quietly as I could, until I reached the next to the last tread. It creaked, and he turned his head in my direction. The fire was behind him so that all I could see was his outline. I levelled my revolver at him—he had not moved a muscle—and told him I had him covered. Then I

stepped around for the light switch. You can see it there at the foot of the stairs. It certainly takes but a few seconds to reach it, turn it and look back again, and yet, Lord Cecil, when the lights blazed on this room was empty!"

Burnleigh leaned forward and repeated after him——

"Empty?"

"Well, not exactly. My daughter stood there by her door in a dressing gown. She asked me quite calmly what the trouble was and I told her."

I could not help asking an evident question.

"She saw the man too?"

"She assured me that she had seen no one in the room. I know that I did."

This was interesting to me.

"How did he get away then?"

"Theoretically, he couldn't. Actually, of course he did. The door was locked on the *inside,* as were all of the windows. If he could have reached my daughter's room in that short interval of time—which seems impossible to me—he would have had to brush her aside to enter, and her window was also locked on the inside. He did not pass me on the stairs. The only other opening that he could possibly have used in this room was the chimney. You may smile, but I examined that and found it too small at the top to pass a man, and it was of course, much too hot to have been a means of egress for even the hardiest and most desperate. He was not visible to my daughter and he vanished before my eyes.

I do not like that sort of thing and have had quite enough. There is some explanation of course, but I am not interested in searching for it further."

There was an interval of silence except for that somber wail of the wind through the trees which was beginning to get monotonous to me. I was the first to speak.

"Did you notice anything *in* the room that seemed disturbed, or that drew your attention, Captain Lowry?"

He got up and went to a small carved box on the mantel. Opening it he took something out and placed it in my hand.

"Only this. Neither my daughter nor I smoke cigarettes."

It was a half smoked cigarette with a peculiar monogram on the butt end. I passed it to Burnleigh.

"There is evidence, Lord Cecil, although I have never seen the brand before. Have you?"

A startling change came over him as he gazed at the crumpled remainder of the cigarette I had placed in his hand. His face became deathly pale and he stared at it as if it were some horrible thing, rather than the paper and tobacco that it was. He tried to speak and failed and then managed to whisper.

"It is one of a brand that my brother Edward had made for him in Egypt fifteen years ago! It was—was never duplicated for anyone else."

And it fell from his trembling hand to the floor. Sitting there in that Lodge, miles from civilization and in the shadow of a place of strange legends, his declaration

was, to say the least disconcerting. This mysterious intruder of Lowry's had left behind him the partly finished smoke of a man who had been dead for years. Certainly the dead man had not——

"Have there been reoccurrences of this sort of thing?"

Burnleigh had mastered his momentary fright.

"Not of that exact nature."

"But equally hard to explain?"

Lowry nodded assent.

"You do not wish to discuss them?"

"Not if you will be kind enough to excuse my seeming rudeness."

Burnleigh quietly assured him he understood, much to my relief. Frankly I had had quite enough of weird tales about the place. This last one was especially upsetting, for it was recent.

The utter stillness with only the incessant rush of the wind from the sea was beginning to pall on me. I felt that if I were to remain inactive much longer I would get into an unhealthy mental state. I was in this thing now too far for any backing out. Not that I had such an inclination. I was convinced it was simply a case of bad reputation, so bad from constant repetition that even the most commonplace occurrences were twisted to contain something of the supernatural.

As I reacted from Burnleigh's startling statement of a few minutes back, I was conscious of a sense of irritation. I was not going to be taken in with all the bunkum of the place. It was evident of course that something

was not quite right. Then quite suddenly a desire crystallized within me—a desire to get my hands on whatever or whoever was back of it all. Burnleigh Manor itself stood as the symbol for all the rest and I felt an instant urge to see the old house with that thought. I rose and reached for my coat.

"I am going to have a look at the Manor."

Instead of greeting my announcement with surprise, Burnleigh slowly got to his feet and answered me in a most matter of fact manner.

"I will go with you."

He had understood the impulse that prompted my desire. Perhaps he had felt the same way himself. At the same time I realized and appreciated the courage it took for him to come to the decision to accompany me. To me it was all something new, and stripped of its peculiar trappings was "just another job." To him it was a return to a place of tragedy—the scene of ugly events and ugly rumors—things better seen in the full light of the sun than the dim, brooding darkness of the night.

Together we started up the long, winding drive leading to the house of mystery. The wind tugged at our clothes and went sighing off into the woods. It brought to us the crash of the surf against the cliffs somewhere out there in the darkness—the tireless efforts of the watery giants to tear down the barrier nature had thrown up against them. Only once as we passed through the dark woods did Lord Cecil break the silence. He leaned close

to my shoulder so that the wind would not carry his voice away.

"Take this, Riker."

He pressed into my hand a small, but efficient feeling automatic. I crammed it into my coat pocket without comment. Evidently he was not shaken in his belief that our "ghost" had puncturable attributes.

At last we came to the end of the woods and involuntarily I halted. In front of me rose terrace after terrace that had at one time formed a lovely cascade of lawn and flower beds. It was overgrown now and the beds had long since disappeared. The tall grass waving in the wind made it seem like a great, wide-stepped stair for some gigantic pair of legs to negotiate.

On the topmost step of this weird stair stood a long dark building with two towers pointing to the sky as if they were arms raised in supplication. The drive over which we had been walking turned abruptly to the left at the edge of the wood and swept in a great arc to the front of the Hall.

Even in the dim light I could see that the house stood on the very edge of the cliffs, so that the tower on the far end seemed to rise sheer from the sea. The moon-rimmed clouds scudded by it driven by the wind and looked as if they touched the tip of the tower in passing. So I had my first glimpse of Burnleigh Manor—dark and forbidding—windswept—with the moan of the restless sea for its voice.

As I took a step forward, Burnleigh laid his hand on my arm. I shook it off rather brusquely and started up the first terrace toward its dark bulk. I wanted to touch it. I wanted actual physical contact with this thing of wood and stone with the melancholy voice. It had laid down its challenge to all of us, and I would feel better after I had acknowledged it at close quarters.

It seemed somehow to be drawing me toward it and I welcomed the pull. On the last terrace I suddenly stopped and stood transfixed, my eyes on the top of the tower nearest the sea. In the fitful light of the moon—arms flung out wide—clothes floating back in the gale—face turned to the dark horizon of the sea—was the figure of a woman!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE picture fascinated me. I could feel the spirit of abandon and exultation that prompted the outflung arms. I could picture the closed eyes and the distended nostrils drinking in the rushing breath of the sea. The gale tore at her clothes whipping them far out behind her. She seemed to challenge the wind and water to come and wrench her from where she stood. On the other hand she might have been the imprisoned spirit of the Manor begging the elements for escape!

I have no idea how long it was that I stood watching, but finally the arms dropped reluctantly and turning, the figure seemed to be swallowed up into the tower. Close beside me I heard Burnleigh's voice.

"We have seen the ghost of Burnleigh Manor, Riker!"

His voice was a shock showing how tensely I had stood watching. His thought was annoying for some reason—possibly because it had been a thought of my own of which I was not proud.

"That was a very real person made of flesh and blood. No phantom would thrill at facing the teeth of the gale from a perch like that!"

"Then would you mind explaining to me how this flesh and blood person gets into a place securely boarded

up and then proceeds to climb through the dark to the top of the tower?"

Perhaps my nerves were beginning to feel the strain. At any rate I snapped back at him quite discourteously.

"I gather you have taken to believing in ghosts?"

"Not necessarily—but after all, why not?"

"I can think of a thousand reasons why not!"

As a matter of fact I suddenly realized I could think of quite a few reasons why I should. I glanced around at him and was relieved to find his face wore a half smile.

"And as for the manner in which our little friend gets up there, I shall be only too glad to show you in the morning."

Turning on my heel I started for the Lodge again, forgetting entirely my original desire to touch the Manor. Perhaps if I had not forgotten, the events that followed would have been somewhat different.

There was no further conversation until we reached the edge of the wood again. Here I turned back for one more look, and far back on the second terrace from the top I thought I could discern a hurrying figure. It was half running and half walking. I grasped Burnleigh's arm and drew him back into the deep shadows of the trees.

"Lord Cecil, someone is coming our way from the direction of the Manor. Suppose we wait here and see who it is. And by the way it would be a very good

idea if we say nothing of what we have seen to anyone."

Closer and closer it came. In the intermittent light of the cloud harassed moon it was apparent that it was a woman and it seemed to me that the part coat, part cape that she wore was the same I had seen fluttering atop the tower. She passed within six feet of where we stood crouched back under the trees literally holding our breath, and I recognized Edith Lowry. When she had passed I whispered to Burnleigh.

"There goes your precious ghost—the caretaker's daughter!"

"Oh come, not really?"

He was all for calling her back and asking her if she had been on the tower and if so how she had reached it. We had a thorough understanding right then and there, and it was agreed that from now on the entire matter was to rest in my hands. No one was to be told anything unless I said so and no questions were to be answered except through me. I was master of the situation for the present at least—a dubious, doubtful honor.

"I know perfectly well that it was not Miss Lowry up there on that tower. Because the poor girl returns from her evening stroll and passes us we immediately connect her with the Manor. It is preposterous——"

I let him run along until he finally collapsed conversationally for lack of opposition.

When we reentered the Lodge, Lowry was still sitting before the fire. That he had been waiting for us was evidenced by the fact that he rose at our entrance.

"Lord Cecil, we have decided to stay as long as you need us."

He avoided looking at us and there was something in his tone that made my heart go out to him. That declaration was the outward evidence of a real disappointment. Burnleigh missed seeing that side of it and was almost pathetically delighted with his decision.

"That is just fine, Lowry! We'll talk things over at length in the morning. Thank you ever so much for changing your mind!"

Lowry bade us goodnight and left for his room on the first floor. We climbed the stairs wearily to our own rooms. I had an idea that ghosts or what not, I was ready for a good night's sleep.

I knew only too well what had changed Lowry's mind about leaving. His daughter had changed it for him. It would have been very interesting to know just what her reasons for staying were. Of the two, she should have the strongest desire to get away.

As I lay in bed going back over the events of the past few days in an effort to get them straightened out in my mind, my thoughts kept coming back to her. She was certainly lovely to look at and there was something in her personality that drew you to her. There was something there also that was somehow unnatural. I tried to analyze it. Her feeling toward me, for instance—from the outward signs what was it? First, something of fear, and then hatred. Hatred was not the right word either—more resentment. Whatever it was I knew that

I wanted it corrected for she was the sort of girl I wanted very much to know.

Perhaps it was not me personally that she resented. Then what? My mission here? Something that I had said? Something I had done? So far I had said and done nothing that I could remember to kindle her dislike. If it was my mission, why should she resent a stranger within the gates of the Manor? She did not want the Manor investigated for some reason? That was the only construction I could place on it, and yet I felt that my conclusion was not very plausible.

Why should an attractive young girl, unrelated to the Burnleighs and surely interested in their affairs in only the most casual way, be upset by someone poking about the old house? Not very reasonable and yet she knew more than she was telling as far as I could see. I could not shake the conviction that it was she who had stood on the tower facing the sea, yet the owner had no idea as to how she could reach her perch. Perhaps she had stumbled on some secret of the place and did not wish to share it with anyone. That explanation did not appear very strong because she was not the phychological type for that sort of thing.

Then the something she had seen at the window that evening. I was absolutely certain that she *had* seen it, despite her denial. It had frightened Hooper, but as far as I could see, it had not produced any strong emotion in her. I intended to question Hooper in the morning on this phase of the situation and would know more after

that—unless his imagination and mine *had* played tricks with us, and she was correct in saying that she saw nothing. That was not very plausible either.

The mysterious incident that Lowry had told us about —the man kneeling before the fire and then vanishing into thin air—did not bother me a great deal because I felt that I knew the explanation. He had not seen a man at all. It was his own daughter who had been kneeling before the fireplace and she had merely stepped to her doorway as he reached for the light switch. But then again she had not been on both sides of that window tonight. There must be someone else involved in this thing, in order for any solution to be plausible. How cruelly annoying that condition of things covered by the term "plausible" can be—or are people not afflicted with an analytical trend of mind free from its tortures?

It was easier to think about Edith Lowry, and much more pleasant. Those deep eyes with a veil across their depths. Those red—and then I suddenly realized what it was about her that was so vastly different. It was *tension!* There was not a single thing about her different from any other pretty and attractive girl except an odd feeling of taut nerves—a tenseness that gripped her constantly. Now then, what caused the tension?

About here I dropped off to sleep and slept soundly and, thank Heavens—dreamlessly.

CHAPTER NINE

IN THE morning we sat down to a leisurely breakfast and discussed the plans for the day. Miss Lowry seemed to have had hers for she moved about seeing that we were properly cared for in a most motherly way. To my over sensitized feelings it seemed that she avoided my eyes and answered my questions in the briefest possible manner, but she was quite kind and probably more than gracious considering the continued scrutiny I was accused of directing at her later by Lord Cecil. There in the small English cottage, with sunshine pouring through the attractive colors of the curtains—a steaming and delicious breakfast on the table—and Edith Lowry making her way gracefully about—well, I felt myself becoming sentimental in spite of the grim business ahead.

That grim business poked its unwelcomed head into the sunny atmosphere of the room when Burnleigh explained that the entire course of procedure now lay in my hands. She sent me a quick glance that had a trace of the feeling of the night before in it. Lowry asked me what would be the order of the work and I turned to face him with a feeling of regret. I explained that before the reconstruction could begin I would have

to study the Manor in detail and then make all my drawings and specifications for material.

"This morning I should like to go through the building from top to bottom with an idea of getting the layout in a general way."

Lowry turned to Burnleigh.

"Then we will have to tear down the boarding."

With my eyes on Edith Lowry's face every minute I asked very distinctly,

"Isn't there some way we can get in without that?"

She paid no heed to my question—not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid—but as Lowry answered it I noticed that she was absent mindedly endeavoring to put the lid of the tea pot on the sugar bowl.

"Not that I ever heard about. However, if you are going to be here working on it we might as well take it all down."

This did not fall in with my plans and I said so.

"If you do not mind I would like the boarding taken off the front door *only* and a new padlock placed on the main doors themselves. That will be the only opening I shall need for the present."

Burnleigh spoke up.

"But the main doors *have* a massive lock!"

I could not help smiling.

"So do all the other front doors I have ever seen. It just happens that I want my own locks there also."

It was a tactless way to put it. My middle initial is "T" but certainly it never stood for tact. The at-

mosphere in the room became frigid and Lowry rose.

"As you wish. Shall we start now?"

That was the end of a perfect breakfast. As I stepped out the door of the Lodge I felt a sort of thrill at the imminence of the first real contact with the old place. Gloom and Lowry had stepped around to the back for a wheelbarrow full of tools, and I could hear them getting under way on the other side of the house. Burnleigh had gone upstairs for a wrap. Quietly I walked around the side nearest me and stopped under the window at which Hooper had glanced the night before. Bending down, I carefully examined the soft earth beneath it. Burnleigh called from the front.

"Riker! Where are you?"

I came around to the front and he seemed a bit startled by my appearance from that unexpected quarter. As we walked toward the Manor he peered around at me from time to time and finally curiosity got the better of him.

"You—er, found something unusual about the Lodge?"

"Unusual and disappointing."

"Really? What for instance?"

"Well, it appears that the one person I had decided to trust is not worthy of trust. You will recall that Captain Lowry stated last night that there was no evidence of anyone having been near the windows? I found distinct and deep footprints there."

"But I cannot believe——"

He lapsed into silence and we plodded along for some hundred yards or so before he spoke again.

"Did you measure the prints or whatever they do under the circumstances?"

"As a matter of fact I did measure them although the identification would be quite simple without that. Whoever it was—and it must have been a man—wore a very unusual foot covering for this country I imagine. To be exact, he was trotting about the night over stones etc., in mocassins!"

"Mocassins! Jove! I didn't know there was a pair in all of Norfolk except those——"

He stopped abruptly and I did not press him for the rest, inasmuch as I had just remembered something I had not done.

"Lord Cecil, I must go back."

"Very well. Why?"

"I intended to talk to Hooper about last night and I forgot it until this very moment."

Burnleigh laid a hand on my arm.

"It will not be necessary to go back. I have talked with him, and I doubt if he would tell anyone else what he has told me."

"Did you get him to say whether he is sure he saw something or whether it was just his imagination?"

My companion had slowed in his stride and glanced about him from time to time as he spoke to me in a lowered voice.

"I am afraid Hooper is done in. He is firmly con-

vinced of an impossible thing. Framed in that window last night he says he saw the face of a man looking at Miss Lowry. I cannot shake him from his conviction, but Riker, his story is that he saw *my younger brother Robert* peering in at her last night!"

That was a poser! I had assumed from the first that Robert was dead and yet no one knew anything about him except he had disappeared completely years ago. Why could he not be here now conducting an investigation of his own? Burnleigh read my thoughts.

"There is no use speculating on that, Riker. It was not my brother."

"Why do you say that?"

"If my brother were alive he would be a man fifty odd years old."

"Well, what of that?"

"Only that Hooper is positive the man he saw was not more than thirty years old. Of course Hooper is certain that what he has seen is the ghost of my brother, unchanged, unaged—just as he was that night he disappeared from the Manor for ever. Hooper is now a firm believer in the occult."

So that was what had given old Hooper such a jolt. Under the circumstances one could not blame him.

"You told Hooper to keep his thoughts to himself?"

"Hooper would do that, you know."

"Has he seen anyone but you?"

"Miss Lowry took him his breakfast early this morning."

"Did he tell her anything?"

"I believe she did ask him what had frightened him so, and he told her in a general way. In fact she suggested that he not——"

"Not tell anyone else—yes of course—but what do you mean by 'general way'?"

"Well, now—I—I say my boy, you are being a bit tiresome with this inquisition thing."

I mumbled some sort of an apology and trudged along with a peculiar feeling of discouragement. That girl—if I was right about her knowing something about the Manor—had a comfortable lead and was bidding fair to maintain it. Burnleigh noticed my dejection and annoyance.

"Oh, come now Riker, certainly you do not think that this slip of a girl is really—well, mixed up in an affair that happened years ago and before she even knew Burnleigh Manor existed?"

"It doesn't matter a great deal what I think. In a thing of this kind it is best to assume every one is a suspect. It would be a relief to me if we could go on that basis."

"I do not know just what it is we are suspected of doing, but on that basis why except ourselves?"

"Suits me, although it happens to be an invitation affair for me."

"And I think we are both being a bit stuffy, don't you?"

I noticed that a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. He probably thought a large part of my pique

could be traced to the coolness with which I was met in certain quarters. It probably could!

As we came out of the wood and started over the stepped terraces, he gave me a sly dig.

"I am looking forward to your explanation of the manner in which your flesh and blood statue reached the top of that tower."

There was no answer to that but the deed, and after thinking things over I had lost a lot of my confidence. However, I meant to go over every inch of the exterior of the place before we glanced at any of the inside, and I was determined to find how the trick was done.

I found Lowry and Gloom at the front door and telling them to wait for me there I started my examination by slowly circling the ground floor. The man who had been commissioned to board the house up had taken his work seriously, and I imagine, was fully aware of the weird contents he was bottling up. I was unable to find one of the house's hundreds of openings that could have been entered by anything short of blasting. The house was a double ell, the main part of the building running back from the cliff with two massive wings at each end standing out at right angles. This, of course made the wings parallel to the cliff and the towers rose at the juncture of wing and main building.

Across the front—on both sides of the great front doors—were long casement windows, all opening on the terrace. Every one of these were securely boarded up, and I am certain, had not been tampered with.

The ground fell away in the rear of the house on a gradual, but sufficiently steep slope to put all the rear first floor windows at an accessible height even if they, too, had not been just as securely closed against intruders There was one basement door but no windows. I gave the door an especially careful looking over, but found nothing for my pains.

Thus far it seemed that to reach the top of the tower nearest the sea it would be necessary to scale some sixty feet of stone wall or make use of a ladder that long, both equally impracticable. The only other alternative would be an entrance not visible to me, or breaking into one of the boarded openings which I was now sure had not been done, and I am no novice at the kind of investigation I gave that place. Naturally I avoided even glancing at Burnleigh when I had worked my way around to the front again. I was decidedly chagrined to fail in my first tilt with the Manor.

Before I allowed them to remove the boarding from the door at the front I gave it a very careful scrutiny. There were absolutely no marks of any kind to indicate it had been forced or even touched. On the floor, just to the right of it, I found one thing that I surreptitiously slipped into my pocket for future study—a hairpin with one or two hairs still clinging to it. They were dark hairs, and Miss Lowry did not have bobbed hair. Then I gave the order and Gloom, Lowry and I ripped off the protecting boards that had kept the World from peering into the somber shadows of Burnleigh Manor.

CHAPTER TEN

WHEN we had stripped away all boards exposing the great studded doors of the Manor (and it was easily a three man job to do it) Burnleigh handed me a long heavy key. I noticed that his hand trembled and the lines had deepened in his pale face. I felt for him. It was the first time he had stepped across that threshold since the day he had seen his brother carried over it for the last time. I knew that the best way would be to get it over as quickly as possible, so I thrust the key in the lock, turned it and swung the doors wide.

The cold darkness of the air that rushed out from the open doors and brushed my face was probably no worse than the air of any place that has been shut up for as long a period of time as the Manor, but it gave me an unexpected creepy feeling even in the broad daylight—and I admit I was thankful for that daylight.

It did not penetrate very far into the shadowy hall, but it was sufficient for me to grasp the sheer beauty of design and execution that had been built into the tremendous place many years ago. To the right and left as one entered the front door were great staircases which ended in a gallery that ran across the entire back of the entrance hall. From the right and left end of this

gallery smaller staircases went up to the second floor level.

Beneath the gallery were long casement windows that had, at one time, looked out on a terrace and below, a garden. Across the gallery itself were long windows also that must have permitted a downward glance at the flowers and shrubs that had grown in the shelter of the two ells.

"This must have been lovely, Lord Cecil!"

He nodded and I barely caught his answer.

"That was long, long ago, Riker."

Something seemed to have placed a depressing hand on our shoulders and I spoke brightly in an effort to throw it off.

"We'll have it back there in no time. Lowry!"

From the doorway behind me came his response.

"Yes, sir?"

"You and Gloom fit a padlock to those doors and give me *both* keys, please."

Burnleigh and I left them at their tasks and with our flashlights began a tour of the house. As I progressed through the spacious halls and large, richly panelled rooms I was increasingly impressed by the beauty of the place and at the time, saddened by the decay and ruin that had overtaken it.

In a quiet tense voice unlike any he had used before, Lord Cecil told me the history of each room, until we came to an immense bedroom on the second floor almost

over the entrance hall through which we had entered. Here he stopped on the threshold and hesitated a moment. I doubt if he was conscious of my presence when he described it.

"This is the Master's bedroom. Here every Lord Burnleigh has slept since the beginning—with the exception of course of the present one——"

I looked for a smile but there was none.

"—and through there is the bedroom of Lady Burnleigh."

When his voice died away, I glanced in the same direction in which he was looking and found that another tremendous room opened off this one. Stepping back, I glanced along the hall for I remembered seeing no door to such a room. There was none, which meant that the only entrance to milady's chamber was through this Master bedroom in which we stood. Rather an odd arrangement but these Burnleighs were an odd lot. The furniture scattered about these rooms must have been worth a fortune in itself for I believe its history carried it back to the Crusades. Now all of it was covered with dust, uncared for and molded.

"While these rooms are in no way detached from the rest of the house, they are in reality a unit by themselves. Below Lady Burnleigh's room is the hall. Below the Master's room is the library which, as you saw, is also the Master's den."

I stood looking at the lovely expanse of Lady Burn-

leigh's room. The things on her dressing table were scattered about just as if she had left them there an hour ago instead of many years ago.

"No trace was ever found of Lady Burnleigh, either, was there?"

"I have run down many rumors, but never once have I met anyone who had seen her again."

Our tour of inspection over, we returned to the great Hall. I could not shake off the peculiar feeling of almost gloom that had settled over both of us. A pair of morocco leather slippers under the Master's bed haunted me. One had been lying on its side just as if a warm foot had recently been withdrawn. Instead of that the foot had been cold—in the ground for—that was morbid and I decided work would be the best antidote.

"I am going to begin my sketches if you do not mind."

I settled down at the table with my note book spread out before me. It gave me a bit of a twinge to think that it was on this same table that Lord Edward had lain the revolver with which he later had shot himself, and that the oil lamp at my elbow was the same one that I had heard mentioned on the boat. However, I was soon engrossed in my first rough drawings and Burnleigh stood looking over my shoulder and making suggested corrections as the sketch progressed.

The rest of the morning passed quickly enough and shortly after noon I locked the door behind us and we started back to the Lodge for lunch. When we had

walked a short distance in the warm sunlight, Burnleigh spoke.

"Well, Riker, what do you think of it?"

"It is one of the loveliest pieces of work I have ever had the pleasure of studying. I don't think I ever heard you say who the architect was."

"I doubt if anyone knows, or if there was one architect responsible for the whole thing. You see as I told you it was built over the foundations of an old pirate stronghold, and perhaps the design was dictated by the original foundations."

"Just the same I am certain that one man's brain conceived that design. It has a single purpose in its set up. Frankly, I think the gossip about it is wicked. It should constitute grounds for a slander charge."

"I hope nothing happens to change your mind. Have you mapped out a plan of campaign as yet?"

I had not. I could see no earthly reason why renovation should not begin at once. If Burnleigh was to be insistent on my determining whether there were any peculiar features not clear to an ordinary survey, then of course I would have to make test cuts through various walls, but the thought of tearing an inch of that place apart hurt me almost as much as if it were a live thing. I was soon to lose my kindly feeling.

"If we are to find any of the clues to the—well, odd events that you told me of, it will be in the Master's rooms, the hall itself, or the library. I shall spend the

afternoon studying them and I honestly hope it will not be necessary to cut into anything."

"Fine! I shall leave you to your work. I want to be of any assistance that I may, but I do not wish to be a hindrance. Further than that you can understand my feelings when I am in the Manor. I will drop in to see you later in the afternoon."

When we approached the Lodge our noses caught an appetizing mixture of odors.

"Love, Riker! I believe I am truly hungry. Perhaps facing this thing out will do a lot for me."

We sat down to a very tasty luncheon served by Miss Lowry. During the meal I inquired who it was that was doing the cooking for us and was shocked to learn that she was doing the whole thing for our large household. Burnleigh was indignant and ordered a cook secured at once. Lowry meekly mentioned that it would not be easy to get a servant to come out here and harder still to keep one. He was immediately over-ruled by Burnleigh who mentioned a salary that should have guaranteed us a French chef. In the intercourse I noticed a difference in Lord Cecil's attitude toward Lowry and regretted the fact that I had mentioned the footprints under the window. As a matter of fact it was possible that Lowry had not seen them in the dark. It was a weak possibility but I did not wish anyone to get the slightest idea he was anything but fully trusted.

As soon as we had finished I gathered up some dishes and followed our present cook into the kitchen. I was

rewarded by a reluctant smile and the news that my services were not required in that capacity, due to the fact that Gloom was chief dishwasher. I made a remark on Gloom's technique which drew a dark and threatening glance from him, and, being hard to daunt, returned with another load from the table. When there were no more dishes I perched myself on the drain board. Alternately Edith Lowry and I dried the dishes that came from the pan before the ridiculously aproned Gloom.

It was perfectly evident that she resented my doing anything for her, but I had long since decided to be friends with this young lady or find out exactly what it was that prevented it. I was not averse to learning anything else that might be possible, but Edith Lowry was not the sort of woman one selected to "pump!" I waited patiently and quietly for her to start the conversation.

"Aren't you rather a high salaried dish dryer?"

"I am entitled to a noon hour, am I not? A whole noon hour with which to do just exactly what I wish?"

"I did not know you had noon hours in your business."

This was a little obvious and I turned it back on her.

"What do you mean 'my business'?"

Her answer to this was typical of her.

"I wonder."

And she disappeared into a closet with some piece of kitchen equipment. I refused to budge, and as she emerged again she continued.

"What are you planning to do with the Manor?"

This was frank and open enough to suit anyone. I had to smile at the thought. There are few flirtations carried on under circumstances such as these.

"Lots of things. Tear some of it out—build some over—and perk up the old place generally."

"That sounds like a long job, Mr. Riker."

"Under pleasant surroundings, Miss Lowry."

She smiled at me frankly and for a moment I felt I was going to have a dizzy spell, but then her eyes clouded over with that same odd, tense expression.

"It is a dark place to work—and cold."

That was interesting. How did she know?

"I heard that you were anxious to get back to the states again so I expect we must be prepared to work night and day."

Now I had mentioned to no one that I was anxious to go back, and sitting there talking to her made me feel that I didn't care if I never got back. The reference to night work, too—odd. Suppose she was trying to find out if the nights would be clear? I began to suspect I *might* do some night work! In fact I made a mental note that it might pay me to do *all* of my preliminary investigation at night. My answer was casual enough although our tête-à-tête had a new keenness to it.

"You know the old place pretty thoroughly, I imagine?"

She turned to face me, dishes done and Gloom fussing about the back door.

"Hardly! It is not the sort of place by reputation that one would wish to prowl around, and one cannot see much through boarded up windows. I make a practice to avoid it."

And I had seen her coming from it early this very morning! I was not ready to divulge that so I switched the subject.

"What do you mean 'by reputation'?"

She sent a quick glance my way which I pride myself was met by my most pleasantly stupid expression. She seemed convinced.

"No one could tell you more comprehensibly than Lord Burnleigh."

"You don't expect the owner to go around knocking his own ancestral home, do you? Especially if the tale concerns family skeletons."

A glass goblet that she had been holding up to the light crashed to the floor and splintered into bits. For a second she looked at me and I saw the fear in her eyes beyond any further doubt. Then she glanced at the glass.

"How stupid of me! When you said skeletons you frightened me."

"I am sorry. Here let me do it."

I gathered up the pieces and put them on the table.

"Now tell me why the mere mention of skeletons should frighten you so."

She hesitated a second and I had a feeling that there

were many thing she wanted to tell me and was on the verge of telling. When she spoke it was apparent that she had changed her mind about doing it.

"You said 'family skeletons'."

"Well then, why should the family variety startle you?"

"Because that is what the local gossips say is lying within the Manor somewhere."

This was news to me. Burnleigh had not even mentioned such a thing.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You knew that Lord Cecil's brother, Edward, shot himself there, did you not?"

There was no use in overdoing this stupid attitude.

"Yes. I had heard that, but he was given proper burial, wasn't he?"

"To be sure, but do you know why they say he killed himself?"

"No, why?"

She looked at me steadily for a moment and I would have given a great deal to know what was passing through her mind.

"It is not very nice of me to spread gossip this way, is it?"

"If I am to work about the old place I think it is only fair of you to tell me what you know about it, or have heard about it. I always assumed he killed himself because he was tired of living."

There was something in her expression now that told

me she saw a chance to scare me off and intended to try.

"You know of course that the youngest brother, Robert, disappeared one night with Lord Edward's wife?"

"Good heavens, what a scandal! Sounds more like New York. Where did they eventually turn up?"

"They have never 'turned up' as you say. The rumor is that Lord Edward had turned miser and had hidden almost all of the family fortune away. Robert demanded his share and Lord Edward's wife took his side. Edward then shot them to keep them from getting it and hid their bodies somewhere about the Manor. That is why I jumped when you said something about the family skeletons."

How much more did she know? And how much truth was there in this new version of the affair? It checked with the details given me on the boat even better than the construction that Lord Cecil had given them. There was one flaw in her story.

"If he killed them to keep the family fortune, why did he allow Lord Cecil to live?"

"Because the ghosts of his first two victims roamed the house and drove him insane before he could do it."

"Oh, come now, that is spreading it a bit thick. The next thing you will be telling me that you have seen the ghosts yourself!"

"Please remember I have been giving you the local gossip, and not my ideas. There are many things hard to explain—even you might have trouble."

I passed up the nasty little dig and asked for more.

"For instance?"

"The footprints going into the house and not coming out 'for instance'."

If I had appreciated what it cost her to say that I should have dipped my flag at the moment. However, I did realize she was trying to draw me out and find just what I knew or guessed.

"The feet of ghosts do not make footprints—as a matter of fact do ghosts have feet? Excuse my ignorance, but no one ever pointed one out to me."

She smiled at me and her eyes lost some of that cold light when she did.

"Perhaps not, but neither do normal people walk up to a house and then evaporate into thin air."

"Perhaps he turned his shoes around and walked back in the same treads."

I was quite proud of that one.

"It would take a genius to do that for two miles, wouldn't it?"

"Well, who said he wasn't a genius?"

I smiled at her but there was no answering one for me. Instead she seemed to be turning some grave thought over in her mind.

"Mr. Riker, it was very nice of you to offer to help me, and to come out and talk this way to me. I have been a bit hateful in repeating that gossip, but would you mind if I said something to you that sounds rather ridiculous?"

"Anything you wish."

And I meant it, for she was mighty sweet at the moment.

"The Manor has brought trouble and sorrow to all who have touched it. There is something unusual about it—something unnatural—something dangerous. Before anyone else is harmed won't you all go away and leave it alone?"

Nicely placed! Enough of the mysterious—sweetly and thoughtfully said to make it look sincere—and I was supposed to get frightened and run away, leaving the Manor to someone else. Then I had an interesting thought! Suppose the fortune that the miser brother had hidden away was in the house? That would explain——

"If you feel you cannot do that, please avoid it at night, and don't ever go there alone."

"Miss Lowry, what do you really know about the Manor?"

She turned quickly and went out of the room.

"Nothing more than I have told you."

I knew she lied and I knew that the way to find out what we wanted to know was to do the two things she had advised me against—stay there at night and do it alone!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TUCKING my flashlight in my pocket and with my sketch book under my arm I started for the Manor. The next stop would be that old lighting unit, and if it was at all workable it was going to start mighty soon! Enough of this mysterious, ghostly business and it gets irritating.

There was no one in sight when I reached the front doors and after I let myself in I left them open. It occurred to me that a free and open exit might not be a bad idea. Then I went directly to the cellar, and what a peculiar place it was!

I found the lighting unit after getting wholly covered with cobwebs and badly lost once or twice in a labyrinth of rooms and passages that seemed to have no logical purpose or plan. I gave the power unit a cleaning and then a tentative turn. The story that Miss Lowry had just told me kept running through my mind. Suppose the old boy *had* murdered them in cold blood? If he had he would probably bury them in the cellar. That was the proper form for the everyday affair back in the United States, and murder was probably the same the World over. Good Lord! I might be standing on them right now! Or I might stumble over their bones any minute. Just then, as I walked around the unit, I did

stumble over something! My flashlight slipped from my hand and went out. I turned in a panic and made a dash for where I remembered seeing the door. Something struck me on the head and I dropped.

I do not know how long I lay there, but when I did regain consciousness I also recovered some common sense. I felt about on the floor for the flashlight, found it and turned it on. I had stumbled over a piece of the railing that went about the base of the motor, and then rushed in the exact opposite direction from the door. I had rapped my head on a low girder that supported the inner step of the outer wall of the Manor. What a fine, cool-headed investigator I had turned out to be!

Sitting down on the railing of the lighting unit I rubbed my head ruefully. I was going to have a hard time explaining away that bump and it hurt. Then an interesting thing came into the line of my flash. The outer wall of the house was at least five feet thick! I had never seen such massive construction on a private residence. I made a mental note of the fact so that my dimensions would take it into consideration. Then I turned my attention back to the source of the electric light.

It was frightfully rusty, of course, and even after my cleaning had cobwebs and dust, but the motor turned over easily enough. I was thankful for that inasmuch as it was of such an old model that parts would have been a problem. I felt convinced that with a little petrol in the tank and new battery units I could make a go of it.

It was quite a relief when I walked out into the sun-

shine and shook off the cold dampness of the cellar. However, I was not being retained to bask in the sun and so reluctantly went back into the Hall. By this time my head was throbbing in a most annoying way.

Gloom had brought some oil lamps up from the Lodge and I lighted one. Then deciding that the proper starting point was the Master's library I started down the hall, lamp in one hand and note book in the other. The oil lamp barely reached to the shadowy corners. The boarding on the windows shut out all light. With not too hearty a smile I recalled that I was alone and that here it might just as well be night.

Dusting off the large table, I placed the oil lamp on it and laid my note book beside it. Then wiping the thick layer of dust from the roomy arm chair that had once been Lord Edward's I drew it up and prepared to work. It was dreadfully silent. The surge of the sea barely reached me and sounded more like someone breathing in his sleep. Occasionally a board would creak and I found myself studying the shadowy corners. Drawing my coat closer about me I reflected on the desirability of investigating the heating unit also.

The first dimension that I needed for my sketch to scale was that along the hallway from the entrance hall to the library door, so taking my scale and flash I went out leaving the door open behind me. When I had worked my way back to the library door again, sliding the scale along the floor of the hallway, I found it was closed! I made a mental note of that for it probably

meant that the wall had sagged somewhere throwing the door off balance. That was one thing to be corrected and yet why had it not started to swing as I walked out of it?

I opened the door to go in the library—and it was in darkness! It did give me a jolt, and I sent my flash in a quick circle about the high old bookcases with their musty volumes. The room was empty and censoring myself for my nervousness I went to the lamp and lighted a match to rekindle the wick. The wick was turned completely down! Now that was peculiar, for lamps do not turn down their own wicks—at least not the kind with which I am familiar. I lighted it again and was conscious of the fact that the hairs on the back of my neck and on my forearms were standing up with a prickly accompanying sensation.

When the lamp was functioning again I gave the room a more careful survey. Everything seemed to be normal, so I sat down in the chair again—but I had forgotten the dimension I had just carefully taken. It was that fact that directed my attention to the fact that my book was gone. I searched for it under the table and chairs in a mild panic, desperately hoping I would find it had just slipped under one of them. It was not to be found. I knew I had brought it in. Now it was gone. Somebody had sneaked into the room and taken it! They were welcome to anything that they found in it so far, but I vowed that from now on nothing important would be written in a similar place. That was one mistake they

had made—they had forewarned me before anything of value could be taken. Who would want it?

Then a new puzzle occupied my mind. Just how had they entered? There was only one door to the library and that was the door from the hall. The two windows were securely boarded—there were no closets—just that door that had been in my view all of the time I had spent in the hall. *Had* it though? It had been closed and I had not seen that. In spite of that my common sense told me that no one could have entered and left that room while I was only a few feet from the door without my attention being called to their movements. How could the door be closed without my seeing it done? Just one way—from the inside. That line of thought brought me to my feet, for whoever had done the closing must be in the room with me now!

I stood listening for quite some time. Was it the sea against the cliff or was it really someone's breathing? Was that a board creaking from age or the result of someone shifting their weight from one foot to the other? Well, there was no help for it, I had to cross the room anyway to get out, so I might just as well take the chance of looking around. Why had I not left that confounded door open when I came in? Or, on second thought, had I not done just that? The room seemed suddenly filled with furniture forming perfect hiding places and the shadows seemed suddenly deeper.

With my flashlight in readiness, and cursing myself for having left the automatic at the Lodge, I made my

way toward the nearest chair. Twice I circled the room examining every conceivable hiding place. Back at the table the second time I leaned against it steadying my nerves as well as my legs. Frankly, I was not feeling comfortable.

I was alone—there could be no doubt of that. The door had been shut—the lamp turned down—and my note book stolen from the *inside* of the room. Whoever had done it had to be in the room with me now. The thief then had to be invisible! I was becoming angry, which was a relief, and I knew that the advice given me was good advice. There would be no more working in this place alone without proper precautions being taken to watch what happened about me—not even during the day.

I was still listening intently and to my straining ears came a peculiar sound—a woman's stifled sob. It seemed to be coming from the hallway, but was so faint I could not be sure. I waited for it to be repeated. Then from somewhere I heard a scratching. It was behind me and sounded like finger nails against the edge of a piece of wood—long nails clutching at the edge of a door. A rat, probably, but I got out and got out quickly. Apparently the ghost had walked!

CHAPTER TWELVE

I WALKED quite rapidly across the terrace until I reached the cliffs, then strolling along close enough to the edge to get the full sound of the surf, I made an effort to go back over the events of the last hour. About one hundred yards from the terrace along the cliff I came to a small patch of woods which had escaped my notice up until this time. The path along which I was walking passed the clump of bushes and trees on the seaward side and when I came abreast, I peered through the foliage in the hope of finding some quiet spot where I could rest. The growth was quite wild and just as I had decided to go on farther, I happened to notice some footprints in the soft earth of what seemed to be a long forgotten path to the center of the undergrowth. Everything was significant now and I stooped lower to see if I could identify them. The identification was somewhat of a shock for the prints were unquestionably made by moccasions and were identical with those which I had seen under the window at the Lodge. Who ever had stood peering through the windows that night also had frequented this spot and if I could judge from the general appearance of the traces left behind, his visit here had been quite recent.

Some distance farther along the cliff I found a large,

flat rock that actually hung over the edge and here, with my face seaward, and with the sound of the sea far below me, I settled down to think it out.

What interested me most was the succession of peculiar events that had happened in the library—and because they were the most recent evidences of the peculiarities of the Manor, they would be the most fruitful to study. On the face of it, someone or something that had the property of entering and leaving a room without being seen, had turned down the lamp and taken my notebook. I did not doubt that it was a warning of a flippant, impudent nature, a sort of "see what I can do if I have to," gesture, but who or what would have the necessary faculty and what could possibly be behind their bravado?

Although in my work, since, I have encountered things I still cannot explain, I have yet to be convinced of any supernatural manifestations. I reasoned desperately with myself that afternoon, perched high above the sea. Spectral hands do not turn down lamps or pick up notebooks. Things such as that would be of no value in the other world. Even the demonstration would be unnecessary and foolish. All that would be required of any loose spirits would be to appear before me and Burnleigh Manor instantly would become a place too small to hold both of us. No, it was a real person—someone who knew exactly what I was doing and knew a trick of the place that let them watch me without being seen. A trick—why had that not occurred to me before? However, I had no desire to go back now for any further investiga-

tion. I felt that I could, sooner or later, by close examination, discover how the trick was performed but I doubted if the identity of the person performing it would be quite so easy—and that question was the most important.

Mentally I started over the list. Burnleigh?—certainly he would not bring me over here at all that expense just for the pleasure of frightening me half to death. He could be crossed off. Lowry?—not the type. While it was true he had been there for years and might conceivably have found something of interest that he wished to conceal, I could not believe he was the kind who would use this sort of indirect, stealthy method. He had wanted to leave anyway, or had said he had. On the other hand, he had lied to me about the footprints under the windows although Burnleigh's explanation of his not seeing them in the darkness might clear him of even this charge. Gloom? He was a candidate, but much as I disliked him I could hardly visualize his taking chances with a position he had held for years. Of course, he might feel that he was perfectly safe, but my own opinion would be that he had neither the brains nor the nerve to execute the nice little coupe of the library. Instead of crossing him off the list I put the mental note after his name that he would bear watching. Hooper was next. He probably knew more about the place than any one of us, things I had better find out quickly, but the poor old fellow was still too knocked out to have been at the Manor this afternoon. I felt that I could strike him off

the list. I had deliberately left Edith Lowry to the last —partly because of my reluctance to associate her with the grim old place and yet partly because there seemed to be some mysterious bond existing there.

First of all, she had unquestionably lied to me, not willingly and not even gracefully but still, something had forced her to deny what I knew to be a fact. Secondly, she was so insistent in her advice that I avoid the Manor and my presence in its vicinity seemed to inspire a peculiar mixture of fear and resentment. Then there was the hairpin which I had picked up beside the front door that morning. Reluctant as I was to admit it and improbable as her nature made it seem, she had to be retained on my list as a possibility. The admission irritated me and I could not picture her wandering alone around a dark and deserted old house in an effort to frighten me. Further, having succeeded in doing so, why should she weep about it and I certainly had heard, very distinctly, the sound of a sob before my hasty exit. Then again, I had been so sure that it was she who had stood on the tower that first weird veiw I had had of the Manor. There was a growing conviction in my mind that whatever her connection with the dirty old place, it was an unwilling one and the thought spurred me on to find the true source of the trouble.

The sob, the hairpin and the figure on the tower fixed the sex of one person mixed up in the affair. There was no other woman on whom I might turn my suspicion unless—and the very thought brought a smile—the mys-

terious Lady Burnleigh who had disappeared so many years ago was still the hostess of Burnleigh Manor. The matter of food and other living supplies made this utterly ridiculous, except a disturbing recollection of the phrase I had heard on the boat—"why can't she rest?"

At least I had narrowed it down to two people. Gloom, a weak possibility and Edith Lowry, a mighty sweet but unknown quantity. I must remember that I really knew nothing about Hooper but certainly he was in no shape to have participated in this afternoon's entertainment. Just then that gentleman went back on my list with a vengeance.

About a hundred yards to my right and a few feet from the cliff someone was moving in the clump of trees. They seemed to be poking about searching for something. Anything was significant now and I started cautiously in his direction. I was conscious of a distinct thrill at the thought that perhaps I was to identify once and for all the wearer of the moccasins. I reached the edge of the growth and through its denseness I saw with a feeling of disappointment that it was Hooper, on his knees, feeling about in the leaves. I am now experienced enough to know that the proper thing to do in a case like that is to wait and watch in the hope of getting the object of the search. Instead of doing it in this case, I broke through the brush and demanded in no uncertain terms to know what he was doing. He was frightened out of his wits by my sudden appearance and jumped to his feet trembling—a really pathetic sight under other cir-

cumstances. I glanced down at his feet and certainly the heavy soled, square toed shoes that he wore bore no resemblance to the foot for which I was searching.

"It's you, Mr. Riker! Thank goodness for that."

"Who did you think it was?"

"I—I don't know, sir. I—don't—know."

I felt that he was really saying, "I won't tell you." I brought him back to my first question.

"I—I dropped something here, sir, and was looking for it."

"What?"

"My—my knife, sir."

I was in the midst of a nice pack of liars.

"Would you mind telling me what use you found for a knife in this spot?"

"Not at all, sir. You see I was er—I was cutting a switch. That was it, sir, I was cutting a switch."

He had had an inspiration and was evidently delighted with himself for having thought his way out of an embarrassing situation so neatly.

I could have pointed out that he was standing some ten feet from the edge in a cleared space with plenty of nice switches growing around the outside, but he would have dodged them, too, so what was the use? Directness was getting me nowhere so I tried craftiness.

"Feeling better, aren't you, Hooper?"

"Indeed yes, sir, much better."

He was following me out of the mass of underbrush, the knife completely forgotten as imaginary knives are

apt to be. When we got into the clear he fumbled in an inner pocket.

"By the way, Mr. Riker, isn't this yours?"

I looked down at my note book in his hands. This was impudence for you! The cool nerve of the man.

"Nice of you to give it back to me, Hooper."

"Why shouldn't I, sir? I found it—that is I picked it up over there on the lawn, sir—or perhaps I should say what was once the lawn."

The look he gave me was bland and innocent. He was a consummate actor beyond a doubt, in fact he was assuming a somewhat injured air.

"Didn't you know that you had lost it, sir?"

"I didn't lose it."

"Now, sir, if you didn't lose it how could I have——"

I was fighting to keep my temper. It was bad enough to get the treatment I had received in the library, but this being played with like a child was too much. I cut him off.

"It was stolen, Hooper, plain ordinary stolen, and if I get my hands on the person that did it I'll break his neck."

He flinched before my look and took an involuntary step backward.

"You aren't suggesting—that I—that I——"

"I am not suggesting anything. I am issuing an ultimatum."

I set off at a fairly rapid pace in the general direction of the Lodge. He trotted along sometimes at my side,

sometimes behind me, apparently deep in thought. Just before we reached the Lodge he rather hesitatingly asked a surprising question.

"Was it taken—that is, did it disappear from the library, by any chance?"

I imagined that I got the purpose of that query. He was anxious to know my reaction to what had happened in there.

"What difference would it make if it had?"

"A lot, sir."

"Just exactly what do you mean by that?"

"Well—it happens that the library has some odd things in its history."

"Such as?"

"Just gossip, sir, just idle gossip, and I am not a hand to repeat that sort of thing."

Of course he was making every effort to evade my questions. He knew something definite and I knew that he did, but it was another thing to get it out of him.

"If you ever feel that your high moral standards are in danger of bending sufficiently to tell me some of this interesting rumor, let me, Mr. Hooper."

"It is merely an aversion to gossip that makes me reluctant to repeat the story of the strange happenings in that room, sir."

That was artfully put. Just enough mystery to intrigue—just enough awesomeness to frighten the weak livered. I found myself wishing he were not so old.

"Hooper, there is some funny business going on around

here and I am a bad one to try it with. In the first place it has made me just mad enough to tear things wide open and in the second place as an American citizen it would be embarrassing to anyone that allowed anything to happen to me while I am over here."

"I understand how you feel, sir. I felt the same way years ago but when the Manor reaches out it recognizes no flag and leaves no trace behind for diplomatic discussion. If you were to take an old man's advice, you would leave it alone."

The second threat in one day! We had reached the Lodge but before opening the door I turned to him.

"I shall want to talk to you one of these days and I want to hear all you know about the place. If you will take some of my advice in return you will hold nothing back."

He bowed and passing me, went to the back. I opened the door and bumped into Burnleigh coming out.

"Well, I was just coming up to fetch you back."

"I knocked off a little early but I'd enjoy a walk."

We went down the walk and I turned our footsteps in the direction of the gates and the open road. Without a question Burnleigh followed. When we had gone some distance along the road he spoke.

"Something has happened to upset you?"

"Plenty."

"Anything that you might call definite?"

"Definite enough to convince me that if we are going

to do anything we have got to do it quickly. As you would say, we are being 'jolly well spoofed.' "

"Not really! What has happened?"

"If you don't mind I'll keep it to myself for a while."

"As you wish."

I could tell by his tone that he was hurt. I had no real reason for not telling him except that I wanted to think it over. I also had a vague idea that I could get advice from him that would be valuable if it were not colored with the knowledge of what had happened to me. I tried to mollify him a little more.

"Don't misunderstand me. I want to turn things over in my own mind before talking about it."

"I merely wish to help."

It was evident that I had not succeeded in appeasing him.

"You can help me by answering some questions, if you will."

"Delighted, if I am able."

"I think you told me some books were stolen from the library while the house was closed?"

"Two volumes, to be exact."

"How were they stolen?"

"How?"

"Well, for instance, from where were they taken?"

"From their place between the book ends on the library table."

If I had only known this I should have looked for any

possible traces left behind by the thief before I had dusted off the top of the old table.

"Of course you have no idea how the entrance to the library was made?"

"None whatever."

"But I believe there were some prints of muddy shoes on the rug?"

"There were."

"Would they not give some evidence of the direction from which the thief had entered the room?"

"That is the peculiar part. They did not, for they showed only that he had walked from the bookcase in the wall to the table."

"In that event they must have been simply a blind to prevent your looking further for the actual footprints left in the dust of the floor."

We walked along some distance in silence and then one very interesting aspect occurred to me.

"By the way, Lord Cecil, do you happen to remember what the titles of these books were?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BURNLEIGH glanced at me through the gathering dusk, with a smile that had something of sarcasm in it.

"I admire the persistent and analytical way your mind winds its way through the details with which you are familiar. Perhaps my modesty should keep me from saying I had much the same thought as that which you are at present turning over in your mind, but I am afraid the titles of the books will not tell you much about the person doing the stealing."

"But you have no objection to my knowing them, have you?"

"None whatever. One was Godfrey's 'The Making of a Will' and the other was Dupruere's 'Egyptian Pyramids'."

"Certainly the gentleman doing the stealing had a wide range of tastes."

"They stood side by side."

"The tastes?"

"The books—naturally."

"In what part of the bookcase?"

"I just told you they were not in the bookcase, but were supported by book ends on my brother's desk."

"Probably they were used recently by him?"

"Recently?"

"I mean that he was referring to them before he—er—died."

"That probably occurred to the thief."

"Did you ever look through them?"

"No."

"Then you wouldn't know whether there were any notes in them?"

"I am afraid not."

I could very well imagine a man about to commit suicide reading the first one about wills; but I could not picture him pouring over a technical discussion of Egyptian pyramids. It is rather pathetic the way the human mind can hold for a second an essential point and then toss it aside in its busy quest for more interesting but wholly irrelevant data.

Burnleigh had fallen exactly into the spirit of the moment. When I asked questions he would answer them, and between times, he left me to my thoughts. When I turned back into the direction of the Lodge he swung along with me without comment. I started my questions again from another angle.

"Would you kindly tell me something about Hooper?"

"There isn't much to tell."

"He was in your brother Edward's service, wasn't he?"

"Devotedly, until a few weeks—possibly days of his—his death. In fact I am not sure he ever left him while he was alive."

"Where was he at the *time* of his death?"

"I do not know. He came to me shortly afterward."

"Try and find out where he was after he left Burnleigh Manor."

"Good heavens, you have not come to be suspicious of poor old Hooper?"

"I am getting so I suspect myself."

Burnleigh turned a quizzical smile my way. Then his expression changed to a thoughtful one and after a few steps in silence he spoke.

"Now that you mention it I realize that I know very little about Hooper."

"I suppose he suggested he would accompany you out here?"

"As a matter of fact, I believe he did."

"I thought so."

"But I am sure that he was moved only by a desire to help."

I kept my own thoughts on this point to myself.

"Did he ever talk to you about the ghosts your brother was supposed to hear?"

"Only once and I shall never forget it. His old eyes blazed with indignation. It seems he was not a believer in ghosts and he had some theory, some vague theory, about Edward being deliberately and slowly driven insane—in fact he always refers to his death as murder."

"Then why did you say you doubted that you could get him to go into the Manor?"

Burnleigh shrugged his shoulders and there was a puzzled frown on his face.

"I don't know myself but I half suspect him of not being quite sincere in his protestations of non-belief in the supernatural."

I recalled the perfectly evident terror of the old man's expression when I had come on him quietly in the bushes and his equally apparent relief on seeing it was I who stood before him.

"I think we had better have a thorough talk with him tonight."

"Very well."

"If I may I am going to take your car into town this evening for some supplies I will need to get the lighting system working. I can take Hooper with me and quizz him a bit on the way."

We turned in the gates and found supper had been waiting for us for quite some minutes. Another black mark against me on the cook's slate! Lowry was not there and his daughter explained that he had gone into town to see what he could do about our domestic situation. It was unfortunate that he had not waited to drive with me. After supper I repeated the performance of lunch by the playing at being dish dryer. I seemed to be making better progress despite the added handicap of my tardiness at the meal for I was rewarded by a smile or two. One thing bothered me. Her eyes looked suspiciously like recent tears. When we had finished I carefully took the hairpin I had found on the Manor's terrace and stooping in a pretense of picking it up from the floor of the kitchen, I handed it casually to her.

"This must be yours, Miss Lowry."

She accepted it and looked at it closely.

"Yes, it is. Thank you."

Then her eyes met mine and something she saw there must have given me away. Her face paled and she looked away quickly. She realized in her remark the possibility of having stepped into a trap. It was a valiant effort she made to regain safe ground.

"At least if you found it here it has to be mine."

I had found out all I needed to know and there was no purpose served in placing her any more on her guard than was absolutely necessary, so I passed it off lightly.

"I am sure that it is not mine, young lady."

She laughed but I felt she was mentally searching for a recollection of dropping it somewhere that would give her away. Then came the remark I had been waiting to hear. It just happened that she was the first to see me in the light without my cap.

"I see you struck your head on something."

"Not a bit of it—the ghost of the Manor attacked me most brutally."

"Not really."

"Can it be that you doubt my word?"

She smiled at me but it did not extend to her eyes. They were direct and unescapable and worried.

"That is possible, but what did you do to make the poor ghost turn on you like that?"

"Wouldn't it be more appropriate to ask what the ghost had against poor me? Well, I'll be broad minded

and tell you anyway. You see I mentioned I might work a little up there tonight and the nasty thing fell on me and almost knocked me out."

Her smile was gone and I noticed that her teeth bit cruelly into her under lip. Into her eyes had crept that old, frightened look and I had a distinct feeling that she was anxious to tell me something but that for some mysterious reason she did not dare.

"Won't you please change your mind about the whole thing?"

"Why should I? Just because someone with a weird sense of humor is having his little joke?"

"What makes you so sure of that?"

She looked away quickly and her fingers played nervously with something on the table.

"I just have a feeling that something terrible will happen if you don't. You have had one example of what I mean and you could if you would, save any more serious repetitions."

"My dear, in my country they divide fights into rounds and ring a bell at the end of each one. You may ring the one for the first round. I concede it to my opponent, but look out for the seventh!"

"Seventh?"

"The seventh round is always my lucky one. The last chap who waited for it is still in the hospital—the one previous is buried in——"

"Please—please do not treat it so lightly."

There was no question of the distress in her eyes now.

She seemed to be cornered in some way and desperately trying to think her way out of the situation. It struck me as an opportune time to bring things out into the open.

"Won't you tell me what it is that is worrying you so frightfully?"

She turned from me quickly so that I was no longer able to see her face.

"There is nothing worrying me, except your stubbornness."

"The very fact that my persistence in staying here upsets you is evidence that there is something back of the things which you know and which you fear."

"There is nothing—absolutely nothing. I asked one favor of you and that was to give up your investigation of the Manor. I am going to ask still another and this one I hope you will grant."

"I am not investigating the Manor. I am here to renovate it."

"Call it what you like. I know what your true errand is."

"We will not argue that. What was the second favor?"

"That you will be kind enough not to pry any further into my private affairs."

There was no bitterness or reproach in her voice.

"My only reason for asking was that I am sincerely interested in your welfare and I thought I might help."

"If you really wish to help me you will go away and leave Burnleigh Manor as it is."

There was nothing in the world I wanted to do more at the moment but she asked the one thing that was practically impossible. Before I could put my thoughts into words she swept by me and out of the room. As she passed I was certain that I saw tears in her eyes.

In a decidedly upset state of mind I went out to the garage behind the Lodge to get Lord Cecil's car and found Hooper, like a statue of patience, waiting for me. Burnleigh had evidently spoken to him, for without a word he climbed into the car and we swung out through the gates and headed toward the town. We had almost reached the outskirts before the silence was broken and then Hooper stirred in his seat.

"His Lordship says you want to know where I went when I left Lord Edward's service."

"I believe I did ask him that question."

Burnleigh's childish trust in everybody was a decided handicap. No doubt he had chatted away with Hooper, leaving the man fully forewarned and forearmed for any questions I might be going to ask. Hooper went on talking:

"I went to Birmingham, sir, where I had some relatives."

"How long were you there?"

"One month after his Lordship's death."

"And then?"

"Then I came out here again to see if I could help, and Lord Cecil took me into his service."

"Could you prove you were in Birmingham?"

"By my relatives, sir—that is, if they were alive—which they are not."

"What was the name of your relative?"

I thought he hesitated a second before answering.

"Ezra Hooper, sir, my brother."

A moment's silence and then we pulled into town. Hooper helped me with my purchases and I looked around in the hopes of picking Lowry up to take him back. We were unsuccessful in our search. I could not imagine where the caretaker could have hidden in a town as small as this one that he would not be found in a moment's looking. It was quite clear that Hooper had something on his mind but he remained silent until we were nearly back to the Lodge again. I wanted to question him fully about a great many things but somehow I felt it would be better to let him open it up. He did.

"Mr. Riker, I am sorry, sir, but I didn't lose my knife this afternoon."

"I suspected as much."

I was quite delighted with the direction things were taking now for apparently we were to get down to a little honest discussion.

"Yes, sir, I had the feeling you did. I was afraid you wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth."

"Well, suppose you try it now, Hooper."

"As it happens, sir, just a little while before you came upon me I had been walking across the lawn toward the Manor."

"With what in mind?"

"It would be easier if you would let me tell it my own way, I think."

"All right, Hooper, go ahead. I'll save my questions until later."

"As I was saying, I was walking across the lawn. I should say I was within two hundred yards of the Manor when I saw someone come out of the clump of bushes in which you found me. He was carrying two buckets. I didn't recognize the man, sir—at first—and the reason for any of us carrying around buckets was not clear to me so I started in that direction. I could tell by the quickness of his movements that he was a young man. For a few minutes I thought it was you. He stepped to the cliff and after he had emptied both buckets over the edge he turned and started for the bushes again. I should say he almost had reached them before he saw me. I must have given him a bad start for he fairly leapt into the brush and was gone. In that instant he hesitated I thought I recognized him."

He paused and seemed to lapse into thought. I prodded him.

"Well, who was it?"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HOOPER passed his hand across his face as if he were making an effort to wipe some disturbing thoughts from his mind.

"I could have sworn that it was—Sir Robert Burnleigh."

"What!—again?"

"I knew you wouldn't believe it and would think I was seeing things. That is why I lied about the knife."

"But you said youself that he was a young man, and Lord Robert would be quite elderly by now."

"I thought of that, sir, the same as yourself, but I still say it was him or—his ghost."

"Oh, come now, ghosts don't carry buckets."

"Well, I never have heard of buckets having ghosts to be carried about."

A wan smile crossed the old man's face and he sank back deeper in the seat with his eyes fixed on the road ahead.

"Your eyes need attention, Hooper."

"Maybe so, sir, but this is the second time you know."

I tried to weigh the facts aside from my personal prejudices and it did not seem probable that Hooper would be fooled twice—if he were telling the truth.

Then I had a brilliant, if late inspiration—for me.

"Did Lord Robert ever have a son?"

A broad smile crossed his face this time.

"He was a single man sir, that is until he disappeared and if he'd had one since it would not be over sixteen years old."

"Isn't it possible that he had one *before* he disappeared?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Riker, for he spent too much of his time with us at the Manor and hereabout, ever to have kept it a secret."

"Well, get on with your story. You followed him into the bushes, of course?"

"I did, sir, but he wasn't there."

"In one side and out the other."

"I'd like to think so, but unless he jumped over the cliff there is nowhere he could go out that I could not see him leaving."

"Good Lord, Hooper, he went in, you went in and he wasn't there when you got there. What else could he do—climb a tree?"

Hooper sat up straight in his seat and slapped his knee.

"I never thought of that, sir, that must have been what he did. I know he wasn't there—that is where I was looking—and I know he couldn't have run across the lawn in any direction without my seeing him—so he must have climbed a tree!"

Hooper sat back with a sigh of relief. I had a feel-

ing that I had advanced in his estimation but I had certainly gone down in my own. At any rate, I had eased his mind temporarily.

"Why were you poking about on the ground when I found you?"

I thought I could see a flush come into his cheeks even in the darkness.

"I thought perhaps there was a secret way to get out of those bushes."

"Via a hole in the ground?"

"There was some gossip to that effect, once, a good many years ago, sir."

"Suppose you tell me about it, Hooper."

We had reached the gates of the Lodge again in spite of the way I had reduced my speed in the last few miles. I swung the car through them but instead of stopping I continued up the wood bordered driveway toward the Manor.

"It seems her Ladyship had a habit of walking along the cliffs on moonlight nights, sir. I know there is nothing unusual about that but she would appear out there at the edge at the strangest times without anyone having seen her come or leave the Manor."

"Ever see anything yourself?"

"Yes, I did once. I came home quite late from the village and I took the way along the cliffs. You may have noticed where it branches off up the road. It is quite a bit shorter. I saw her Ladyship standing on the very edge, just where he emptied the buckets this after-

noon. She looked as if she was crying and she was standing very close to the edge of a very mean drop right there. I did not know exactly what to do and while I stood wondering she turned and went into the clump of bushes. I walked by there a few minutes later whistling, thinking it might cheer her up. I'll admit I peeked in a bit, and when I didn't see her in there I went in all the way. Her Ladyship was gone just like Lord Robert—that is the man I saw today—and I'm rather sure she hadn't climbed any tree, sir."

We had come to the end of the woods, and the terraces to the old house lay before us bathed in the moonlight. I switched off the lights and brought the car to a stop at the very edge. Just for a second I thought I had seen a figure on the tower nearest the sea but the distance was too great, and the moonlight too deceptive for me to be at all sure. Reaching in the back I took one of the packages containing flashlights and breaking it open, gave one to Hooper and took one myself. Then I climbed out,

"What are you thinking of doing, sir?"

"I am going to have a look at that clump of bushes right now."

"I—I wouldn't sir."

"Then stay where you are," and I started across the lawn toward the cliff. I had not gone far before Hooper caught up with me and touched my arm. Apparently he preferred accompanying me to sitting in the dark alone.

"Couldn't you wait until morning, sir?"

Perhaps I was short with him for the simple reason that there was nothing I would rather have done than take his suggestion.

"I could, but I don't intend to, and by the way, Hooper, will you please stop whispering?"

"I'd rather not say anything than——"

"Well, try that then."

We walked a little way in silence and then Hooper spoke again in a tone almost as annoying as whispering.

"I am sorry that my way of talking annoyed you, sir, but when you have been around the Manor as long as I have, sir, you get a feeling that the place has ears. It must have. I remember one terrible night when Lord Edward was alive, we were in the——"

An involuntary shiver went up my spine and I interrupted him,

"Some other time. Now, just where was this man standing this afternoon?"

Hooper hesitated a second and then pointed ahead of us in darkness.

"About there, sir."

"Show me."

He looked at me and then at the spot but made no move.

"I'd—I'd rather not."

"Come on, I'm going with you."

Still he made no move.

"I—I think I ought to tell you that it was just below

there that they found the body of the man from Scotland Yard just a few months after——"

"Well, we'll be careful not to fall over."

Hooper fell back on his whisper.

"Somehow I don't think he—fell over, sir."

There was a rustling in the bushes behind me and I wheeled quickly to face it. Some innocent night bird rustling the leaves probably, but the perspiration stood out on my forehead just the same. My own reaction annoyed me. This constant insinuating around me was finally taking effect. Everyone seemed to want me to turn tail and get out for reasons of their own. I made a solemn vow that if I was to die of fright (the thought brought a welcome smile) I was going to die with my face in the right direction. I put it to the test.

"You are going over there if I have to carry you, Hooper."

It worked.

"Very well, sir."

He started off quite bravely for one so recently in deadly fear. He was probably disgusted with me for being so hard to scare. What a chuckle he might have had if he could have known my real feelings as I followed him.

"He was standing right here, I think."

He was on the edge of the cliff and I was beside him just out of his reach and very much on my guard.

"And then he turned, I believe you said, and went straight into the bushes?"

"Yes sir."

"Like this?"

I turned away from the edge and started for the clump. I had wanted to look over the side but had not felt safe enough to let my attention wander. My flashlight was on now and Hooper had turned his on, too. I looked back and saw that he was following directly behind me.

"There is one thing we will have to be careful of, Hooper, and that is not to let the light from these shine on each other for one instant."

He did not answer.

"Did you hear me?"

He was a consummate actor for he gave one of the finest imitations of chattering teeth I have ever heard.

"Y-y-y-yes—s-s-s-sir."

We passed through the bushes at separate points about ten feet apart and met again in the clear space inside.

"Put out your light and stand close to me."

He obeyed at once. I kept him a little in front of me, swinging him about as I allowed my light to make a complete circle about us. The beam from my light disclosed nothing but the bare bushes and the scrubby twisted trees. As far as was humanly possible to determine, we had the clump of scrub growth to ourselves. There was a slight tremor in the arm I was holding, but the voice was quite steady and calm when he spoke.

Apparently he was gradually laying aside his frightened rôle.

"Although I still think the daylight would be better, sir, if you intend continuing I suggest we divide the place in half and each take one part."

I drew a line with my foot through the leaves.

"All right. That is your half and this is mine. If we find nothing we will change halves and try again."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I DIDN'T want him to think that his suggestion was going to keep me from seeing his half. Turning my light down on the ground I began scraping it bare of leaves with my foot. Back and forth we worked across the clearing. From time to time I glanced over at Hooper's light and I had a feeling that his eyes were on me a good part of the time. So the search went on for some time. There was no need for conversation but the silence was oppressive. I began to wonder if I had played the ass. Here I was in the middle of a dense piece of woods with a man I certainly did not trust. Supposing his tale had been told with the deliberate intent to lure me in here so that someone else, an accomplice, could drop me over the cliff—another accident in the dark? I decided to give the trees that bordered the clearing a wide berth and to stop the search as soon as I could reasonably do so and still save my face.

I heard the far away hoot of an owl, probably in the trees about the Manor, and then I snapped out my light and straightened up with a jerk. It was answered almost at my side! Hooper spoke in an agitated undertone.

"Did you hear that, sir?"

"I am not deaf."

"Are you all right?"

"Absolutely. Find anything?"

"Not yet, sir, but I don't like that."

"Don't like what?"

"The owl, sir."

I snapped on my light again and started poking about but my mind was on other things. I most assuredly did not like the owl either. I am not an expert ornithologist, but I have had enough experience to know one thing—that owls are not in the habit of making a sound when there is a light near them, and certainly not a moving light. One or two other facts came back to me. When we had started across the lawn I remembered vaguely that there had been the hoot of an owl from the Manor. When we stopped at the edge of the cliff I had heard it again. Coincidence, probably, but I had a vague recollection of reading somewhere about bird calls being used as signals and it is a peculiar owl that hoots not ten feet away from a flashlight! As I said before it seemed to come from a point almost at my side. Hooper? Possibly, but yet it had seemed to be a little beyond him among the trees. I was about to call it a night when I heard Hooper's voice tense with some excitement. He had left the clearing but I could see his light among the trees on the far side.

"By Gad, sir, you weren't far wrong at that. I believe I've——"

There was an unpleasant sounding thump followed

by another as if he had stumbled and fallen—and then silence. His light had gone out and I stood listening for some further sound. Then clear and loud came that same call—the long drawn out hoot of an owl and from the distance, softly and mournfully, the answer. I stood rooted to the spot a moment. Then I called to Hooper and received no answer. With my light sweeping everything ahead of me I went toward the place where I had last seen the glow of his light and found him. He was lying on his face and blood was flowing freely from an ugly gash across the side of his head. He was moaning softly so I knew he was not dead. Forcing my way out of the clearing I ran completely around it but no one was in sight in any direction. Then in the distance I saw a figure running down the terrace. It had apparently just left the Manor and was headed for the Lodge. It was a familiar figure—one I had seen hastening over those terraces the first night and for reasons of my own, one which I did not care to investigate. At any rate, it could have had nothing to do with what happened to Hooper. That meant that Hooper's assailant was still in the brush and the trees! In the next few minutes that spot had a thorough examination for I was fighting mad. I found no one.

I returned to Hooper and turned him on his back. He was still moaning but was only semi-conscious. I was about to lift him when I saw that he was making a desperate effort to say something. I placed my ear close to his lips in an attempt to catch the words.

"I—I think I'm done for, Mr. Riker. A letter—by your knee. Please don't ever go in—the Master's—bedroom. Before I go—promise to keep everyone—out of——"

His head dropped back against my shoulder and he was still except for his fitful, irregular breathing. I glanced at the ground where I was kneeling and saw the letter to which he referred. It had evidently fallen from his pocket. Cramming it in my jacket pocket I half carried and half dragged him out of the thicket. He was a heavy man but somehow I managed to get him across the long stretch of lawn and into the car and so back to the Lodge. When I brought the car to a stop, the Lodge door was thrown open and Burnleigh came out followed by Lowry. They saw Hooper slouched down in the seat with the entire side of his face now covered with blood. Burnleigh was the first to find his tongue.

"Good Lord, Riker! What has happened?"

"Hooper had an accident. Help me to get him in."

I carried him in and stretched him out on his bed. Burnleigh dispatched Gloom in search of a doctor. I was bathing his head as gently as I could. Everything was hustle and bustle, an ideal condition for anyone covering his tracks. I heard the car whizz through the gates. If I had been really clever I would have carefully noted where Gloom was when I came back, but then I do not believe people are ever as sagacious or astute in real life as they are supposed to be in these mystery novels.

After I had fashioned a crude bandage to stop the flow of blood I turned him over to Lowry's care. He had not opened his eyes nor showed any signs of returning consciousness. When I had washed my hands and started for the front room Burnleigh followed. Naturally he was curious to learn what had happened, but I should have preferred being alone at that moment. I had a lot to straighten out in my own mind before describing anything to another person. The old man's warning about the bedroom at the Manor that had come at such a seemingly inappropriate time, for instance. Then I felt the letter I had hastily crammed in my pocket.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I HAD it in my hand when I entered the living room. As we came in Edith Lowry got up from a chair by the fireplace, and as she turned to face us her eyes fell on the letter almost instinctively and then swept quickly away. She wore her coat and hat so I ventured a question to start the ball rolling.

"Going out?"

Frankly I hoped she was but with her characteristic quickness of gesture she swept the hat off her lovely black hair.

"Just coming in."

Burnleigh drew three chairs about the fireplace.

"Won't you sit down a few minutes and talk with us, Miss Lowry? There has been rather a nasty accident and Mr. Riker is about to tell us how it happened."

At the mention of accident she stiffened visibly. I had not taken my eyes from her face and I knew she felt it. She was doing everything in her power to avoid looking in my direction. Perhaps my next remark was a little crude, but I couldn't help it.

"How do you know Miss Lowry would be interested in *my* account of how it happened?"

Burnleigh gave me a glance full of wonder at what seemed to him to be an uncouth and ungentlemanly expression of peevish vanity; but the glance that gripped me and left me a little breathless was the direct one I got from the girl herself. She seemed a wholly different person for a second—the look in her eyes was like that of a bewildered child, pleading and afraid—and then the mask dropped again.

"I was shocked to hear of poor old Hooper's—accident—and I do so want to hear how it happened."

She dropped gracefully into the chair furthest from me and sat staring at the fire while I went over the events of the clump of bushes. Although her chair was turned so that she faced me, her hand was against her face to protect her eyes from the light of the fire and it kept me from seeing any of her expressions. I carefully avoided mentioning my thoughts on the owl hooting and the real purpose of our search. When I had finished Burnleigh leaned forward.

"Then someone actually struck Hooper down?"

I thought I saw a slight shudder pass over her. I nodded to Burnleigh.

"From behind. That was bad business and very foolish on the part of whoever did it."

She started to speak, failed, and then in a voice little above a whisper,

"What do you mean 'foolish'?"

I answered her slowly and with emphasis.

"Just that violence begets violence and, Miss Lowry,

murder is not a nice charge to be laid at your door—not even that of an accomplice to the act."

She rose quickly. It was probably cruel of me to say it but I hoped that by constantly driving home to her the seriousness of holding any information she might have, that eventually she would be forced to divulge it and allow us to really help her.

Burnleigh spoke rather explosively.

"Murder! You don't mean that old Hooper—will—that he——"

"It may be. He is badly hurt and any jury in my country would be convinced it was *attempted* murder."

She swept by me toward her room.

"If you will be kind enough to excuse me, I think I shall go to my room. It has all been so—so horrible. I am hoping that in the morning we will find that poor old Hooper just fell in the dark and struck his head as he went down."

"After being pretty badly frightened by stumbling over an owl in the dark."

She stood framed for a second in the door and her face was deathly pale.

"I am afraid you are deliberately trying to be rather horrid, Mr. Riker. Would it not be a little kinder to let me hope that poor old Hooper's injury came from a fall and that we will find him all right in the morning?"

For a moment or two after the door closed behind her there was silence. Then Burnleigh stirred and when he spoke there was a note of relief in his voice.

"It does seem a lot more logical to suppose that Hooper received that cut in a fall, than to suppose any prowling murderer would attack an old man that never harmed anyone."

I should have liked to leave him with that thought, but it was not a time for delusion.

"It was not a fall."

"But my dear boy, you admit yourself that you were not near him at the time!"

"I was near enough to notice some very peculiar features."

There was some impatience in his voice now.

"Really? Well, why on earth should anyone——"

"Because Hooper had just, or was just about to discover something that the person who struck him down did not want him to know."

"That again is supposition, and I think you have been rather ungracious to Miss Lowry about the whole matter."

"I think I have every reason to be so."

He turned to face me and there were two bright spots of color in his cheeks.

"I must insist, Riker, that you stop acting as if you suspected that young girl of doing it herself!"

My own temper was rising a bit.

"I cannot remember saying any such thing, but I will say right now, that if she didn't she knows who did and why!"

"Riker! How can you think such a thing, much less say it!"

"Then suppose you tell me how it was that she knew the accident had happened to *Hooper*?"

He hesitated a moment, and there was less conviction in his voice when he answered.

"Someone must have told her, of course."

"Who? Every one of us that knew had absolutely no way of imparting that news to her."

"It is impossible—impossible. How about——"

"Gloom? He was in——"

"Glome, if you please."

"Oh, have it your own way!"

My temper had the upper hand for a moment and I stalked to the mantel and stood looking down at the fire. Then from far away I thought I heard the call of an owl. It may have been the wind through the shutters, but it brought back the memory of that call at my side in the wood.

"Another thing you might explain to me if you will. Are English owls in the habit of hooting at the sight of a flashlight?"

"Naturally not, but why should you ask that? There are no owls in this part of the country at this season."

"I heard two—possibly more tonight."

"I am afraid Miss Lowry was right about your imagination."

"I tell you I heard them not six feet away from——"

"And I tell you there are none here for another two months."

I crammed my hand into my pocket for a cigarette and realized for the first time that I had been clutching the letter picked up from Hooper's side in my hand all that time. I was about to lay it on the mantel when I noticed it was addressed to "Whom it may concern." The flap was not sealed and I opened it. Spreading the sheet out in the light from the fire, I read.

To whom it may unfortunately concern,

If Burnleigh Manor strikes it will be with regret, and only to protect itself. It will also be with the hope that the warning will be heeded by all others. It is not a safe place for the living. It is not even a safe place for the dead. It will guard its secrets at any cost. Perhaps you who read this do not believe in ghosts—at least not in the kind who write such notes as this on ordinary paper, and yet you may believe me when I say I am justified in signing myself,

THE SPIRIT OF BURNLEIGH MANOR.

I read it a second time, slowly and carefully, and then passed it to Burnleigh.

"Read this, and see if it checks with the fall theory."

When he had finished reading it, his fingers continued to run along its edge nervously.

"Where did you find this?"

"Beside Hooper's—beside Hooper where he lay on the ground."

Then in that familiar, tired voice I had heard on the boat he spoke as if he were alone in the room.

"I must go on alone. It is not fair for me to jeopardize the lives of others in this strange place. There can be no doubt now of the risk."

I rescued the letter from his fingers.

"Stop mauling the evidence, and stop worrying about the rest of us."

"Evidence?"

"Certainly. I have a sheet of paper here that came from the same hand that dealt the blow. I even have a sample of his printing."

This seemed to revive his spirits somewhat and he leaned forward with a new light in his eyes.

"Let me see that sheet once more."

He rose and taking the note from my hand stepped into the light from one of the lamps with it. I saw his thumb pass slowly over a crest which I had noticed myself at the top. It was heavily pressed into the paper and looked like a coat of arms. When he straightened up from his examination and faced me again the light had died from his eyes leaving them dull and bewildered.

"You will learn nothing from this, Riker."

"Why not?"

"Because, impossible as it may sound, this sheet of paper is from the personal portfolio of my brother Robert. Take it. You will notice the crest of arms at

the top which is that of the Burnleigh family, and then pressed on the face of the shield is the letter "R" which identifies it positively as that of Robert Burnleigh."

To me this opened up a new and interesting line of thought.

"What disposition was made of Robert's personal effects after he—he disappeared?"

Burnleigh went back to his seat.

"Everything of this nature was destroyed, although I have a feeling that this would disappear with him."

If that was a fact, and surely Burnleigh should have known, then it meant that the person writing this note must have secured the paper *after* Robert disappeared and from the supply he took with him. That was not really a safe assumption for there might have been one or two sheets left behind somewhere.

I scrutinized the printing closely. It was done in ink and in the crudest sort of way with every effort to avoid identification. Yet its phrasing and wording seemed to indicate culture.

"Does the writing look at all familiar to you?"

Burnleigh did not even take his eyes from the burning logs when he answered.

"I do not believe there is a living soul who could identify the writer from that carefully disguised printing."

Summing up, all that could be derived from our only tangible piece of evidence, was the fact that the paper

came from the personal effects of Robert Burnleigh, and the writing was such a scrawl that it was hopeless as a clue. To find the person who would be in a position to secure the paper put us in exactly the same position we were in before receiving the note. We could do that with greater certainty and speed by finding who it was that was behind the peculiar happenings at the Manor.

One phrase of the letter puzzled me and I thought aloud.

"There is something behind that line that reads, 'and yet you may believe me when I say that I am justified in signing myself the Spirit of Burnleigh Manor.' "

"Probably."

"I have a feeling that if we think about that hard enough it will lead us to what we wish quicker than any other thing in the letter."

Burnleigh shook his head.

"It might mean so many things where the Manor is concerned."

"Well, beginning tomorrow we can at least stop fooling."

"Have we been fooling?"

"No, not exactly, but I mean that we can start right in tearing that place apart stone for stone. Whatever is in there will be forced out in the open."

"Yes, Riker, but that will take time and something —something sinister may happen while you are doing it. I could never forgive myself that after this."

He indicated the letter.

"As for that letter, I am going to show them what one Yank thinks of their mysterious bunkem. From tomorrow on, I am going to live at the Manor all of the time!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BURNLEIGH stared at me as if I had suddenly gone mad.

"*Live* at Burnleigh Manor?"

"Certainly."

"You are joking, of course?"

"Not a bit of it. I intend to move up there in the morning."

Wearily he rose from his chair, and coming up to me placed his hands on my shoulders.

"You will do nothing of the kind, my boy. In the first place the house is not habitable—no heat—no light—and in the second place I could not permit you to take such a risk after what has happened tonight. I am sorry now that I spoke as I did a moment ago. You were entirely right. This time I am right."

I could understand what was going through his mind very easily. He was so steeped in the lore of the place that it had done what I fought off allowing it to do to me—upset all logical processes of reasoning. In the next few moments I endeavored to convince him he was wasting his breath with protests against my plan.

"But my boy, can you not see that you are doing the very thing that will hamper the result you desire?"

"I can not. The nearer the job, the faster the work."

"Ah, but not this one. I admire your courage, but you are doing the one thing that will place you at the mercy of—of the 'Spirit of Burnleigh Manor' for lack of a better title."

When he saw I was determined he turned away with a shrug and stood silently looking into the fire. For a moment he was absorbed with his own thoughts and then he spoke very quietly.

"You have been right in so many things I do not see that I have the right to question your judgment in this either. I believe I said at one time that it was entirely in your hands. I shall try to remember that more often. We will move in tomorrow."

I was somewhat taken back by the way he put it.

"We?"

"You and I."

"Now look here—there is no sense in your going through any possible unpleasantness just because——"

"A moment ago you told me to save my breath. May I wish you the same economy? I have come to like the idea and I, too, have quite made up my mind."

There was the sound of a car coming up the gravel of the drive and it came to a stop at the door. Gloom ushered in the doctor, a wizened and unpleasant looking little creature. With the most brusque sort of greeting he made for the stairs under Gloom's leadership. Burnleigh followed closely at his heels and I turned to pick up the letter from the mantel before following. I had carefully put it in my inner pocket and had placed my

foot on the first tread to go up when I was stopped by a peculiar sound. I stood listening and it came again. Through the door of Miss Lowry's room I heard quite distinctly the sound of sobbing.

Perhaps all women sound exactly alike when they weep, but that sound as it came through the closed door seemed identical with the stifled one I had heard that afternoon as I stood, frightened and silent in the Library of Burnleigh Manor. I felt a strong desire to go into her room and beg her to tell me what it was that made her cry—to beg to be allowed to help her but instead I went on upstairs and to Hooper's bedside.

We all stood silently by as the doctor made his examination. When the little man straightened up his face had a worried look. I found out later that when his features did not have their usual crafty set, they relaxed into this worried one.

"This man has suffered a nasty concussion from his —from his fall. It *was* a fall, was it not?"

I hastened to assure him it was for I saw Burnleigh's indecision, but he gave me rather a suspicious, steely glance. Burnleigh came to my rescue.

"Does that mean it is serious?"

The shriveled little doctor fairly bit off his words.

"Naturally, although it is impossible for anyone to say how serious as yet. He must have absolute quiet, of course—no noise—no conversation of any kind—and now if someone that is not paralyzed will help me——"

I stepped forward and he prepared to dress the wound

in Hooper's head. The sight of the bloody gash made my own blood boil. All previous suspicions and prejudices with respect to him had fled from my mind and all that was left was a strong itching in my fingers to get them on the throat of the person who had dealt that blow. It was a contemptible thing to do to a man as old as Hooper, and certainly they would not do it to one who was allied with them.

Naturally, I was not in a pleasant frame of mind when I left Burnleigh and Lowry with Hooper and the Doctor, and reëntered the living room. I was not surprised to find Edith Lowry standing in her door very apparently waiting anxiously for news of Hooper.

She wore a flimsy sort of negligee which was most attractive in the soft light of the fire. I was alternately torn by a desire to tell her she could count on my help no matter what was back of it all and a desire to shake her until she told whatever it was she knew or suspected of the Manor. She stepped toward me as soon as I came down the stairs.

"He will be—will be all right?"

Her agitation made her just that more attractive and when I stood quietly looking at her she went on haltingly.

"He is not—is not hurt—badly, is he, Mr. Riker?"

"The doctor says he has a rather bad concussion. It must have been a bad—fall."

She turned away slowly when I mentioned the fall.

"But you have not told me that he will be all right."

"Because there is no assurance that he will be."

Her face was deadly white and her eyes wide with horror.

"No! Oh, no! You are not telling me the truth!"

Just as I was about to capitulate to the appeal in her eyes a new thought occurred to me. This was the first time I had seen her poise upset, and perhaps if I were cruel with her for a few moments, by driving her tighter in the corner I might secure the information that I wanted and so help her. In other words, by hurting her still more I might put myself in a position to assist her later. Steeling myself for the effort I stepped closer to her.

"Miss Lowry, do they hang people over here for murder, or do they have——"

Her hand quickly went to her slim white throat.

"Oh please—please!"

She turned quickly away from me and rested her head against one bare white arm stretched along the mantel. The light of the fire outlined her figure in a lovely haze, and tinged the waves of her hair with red. I was actually driving myself along now with gritted teeth.

"Well, do they?"

Then she did the one thing with which I was not prepared to cope. Turning from the fire she walked slowly toward me until I could have reached out and touched her—and how I wanted to do just that! Then with a shock I saw that there were tears in her eyes. It was one thing to hear a sob and go on, but to have to

look into soft dark eyes fringed with tears and continue with a sort of inquisition, was something else again. Sooner or later I knew that I was going to give in.

"Why do you ask me that, Mr. Riker?"

My voice sounded strained and far away to me.

"Because I want to know."

"No, it is because you hate me and think it will make me suffer just that much more. Why do you hate me so?"

I heard myself talking—automatically—with no thought behind it.

"Probably because you feel much the same toward me."

She stood looking up at me and the room seemed to be spinning about us both. Soft hair about to fall—a hairpin by the door of a grim old house—soft white throat with a visible pulse meant for kissing—a coarse brown hangman's noose—it was all a bewildering kaleidoscope.

"How can you say so positively how I feel toward you? I warned you of a danger threatening you. That was hard for me to do and certainly it was not an unfriendly thing for——"

She stopped speaking and seemed to be listening. Looking into her eyes this way was not helping me a bit. I would shortly be in a state where I would believe anything. Then I decided to throw pretense to the winds and strike at the heart of things.

"Edith, you know something about that place up there

that is terrifying you. I can see it. You could have prevented what happened tonight by telling me what it was and that thought is driving you half mad at the moment. Won't you——"

"Only you could have really prevented it from happening—by going away. Please do it in the morning—before—before anything else dreadful happens!"

She started to turn away but I grasped her shoulders and held her facing me. The soft skin of her shoulders was icy cold.

"Look at me!"

Reluctantly she turned her gaze up to meet mine.

"Now tell me what there is about Burnleigh Manor that you fear."

Twice she started to speak and failed. Then in a voice just above a whisper she spoke.

"In telling you I would sign the death warrant for my father and for you. I want to tell you—of all people I should want you to——"

Then, as if carried to us on the wind from some far-away spot, came the twice repeated call of an owl to its mate. She stiffened in my grasp and I felt a shiver pass over her. Holding her still tighter I tried to make my voice stern.

"Now, tell me! Tell me what that call means!"

Her eyes wandered about the room and I noticed that they dwelt longest on the windows and the fireplace.

"There is nothing to tell—nothing. I know *nothing!*"

"There are no real owls here at this time of year.

That is a signal, isn't it? A message to someone—to you?"

She threw her head back and looked at me for a second. There was a desperation in her eyes now, and a flush in her cheeks that looked unnatural.

"I heard no owl, Mr. Riker!"

She wrenched herself free of my grasp and went toward her room.

"Then I shall find out for myself what you will not tell me."

At her door she turned back.

"Please, please, if you—if you think anything of me at all go away!"

"And leave you here alone—like this? Miss Lowry, what I start I finish and this is going to be no exception."

"I have said more than I should. No matter how you may think in the days to come of what I do, I will try to help——"

From somewhere close by came the call of the owl again, sharp and imperative. With a sob she slipped into her room and the door closed behind her. From the head of the stairs I heard a slight movement and looking up I saw the sharp suspicious oval of the doctor's face. Besides medicine, he apparently practiced eavesdropping.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE doctor came down a few steps and stood as if listening for something. Behind him I saw Burnleigh.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Riker?"

"Hear what, that you did not, doctor?"

He had the grace to flush but with it came a wicked little gleam in his eyes. He held no love for me apparently.

"That owl call, of course."

"I think I remember hearing something like it. What of it?"

Then in a mysterious—the word pious almost fits—manner reminiscent of old stage villains, he literally hissed,

"That is the ghost of the Manor!"

I laughed—not at the thought of the ghost—but at the picture of the learned man of medicine discussing such things with a voice that trembled.

"Well, you can come on down without being afraid, doctor. I am not the ghost and I will do my best to protect you."

He stamped down indignantly and somewhat ridiculously. Burnleigh followed a bit sheepishly, and behind

him came Lowry with a twinkle in his eye as it met mine that I understood.

For the next fifteen or twenty minutes Burnleigh and the doctor discussed Hooper's condition. I discovered that Lord Cecil had more than a smattering of medical knowledge. Lowry had plead weariness and had gone off to bed. I lit a cigarette and turning a chair sat with my back to the fire and watched the changing expressions on the faces of the two deep in their medical discussion.

Finally the doctor rose and we went to the door with him. I could not resist one dig at the ferret-like little fellow before he got away.

"I take it that you believe in ghosts, doctor?"

He glared at me indignantly.

"Nonsense and poppy cock!"

"Poppy cock is the expression I believe, but I thought you informed me a moment ago that I heard the——"

"—the call that is *supposed* to be the ghost of the Manor."

"Oh, I see. Have you any theories explaining the matter?"

"If I have, I keep them to myself, sir."

Gloom had started the car, and the little man climbed in beside him. The car lurched through the gates (Gloom was not a good driver) and disappeared into the night. Burnleigh called out a good night that was not answered and we turned back into the room.

"I am weary and shaken up a bit, Riker. I think I will turn in."

I was not averse to it myself, so I locked the front door and followed him up the stairs. Leaving my door open I sat on the edge of my bed to think over the tangled events of the evening. Why had I not told her my real feelings? They might have seemed rather ridiculous in view of our short acquaintance, but things like that had happened suddenly before. There had been one moment when it seemed as if she had wanted me to—would have understood everything I would say. Perhaps I had mistaken her distress for other emotions. At least——

Someone had just closed the front door very softly. I had just locked it and left the key in it. That meant the person closing it was going *out*—going out this time of night! Who? Burnleigh should be in bed by now, in fact I could hear his deep breathing through the adjoining dressing room. Gloom had not returned and would sleep over the garage when he did. Lowry was to sit up with Hooper until three when he would call me for relief. That left Edith Lowry alone in a position free to go—and she had been partly prepared for retiring when I had talked to her. It would bear investigating.

Fumbling about on my dresser in the dark I found the little automatic and jammed it into my jacket pocket. Then as noiselessly as possible I slipped down the stairs

until I stood by the light switch. With the revolver in readiness and my back to the wall I snapped the lights on. The living room was empty, but the key was gone from the lock in the front door. I tried the door and found I was locked in. As quickly as I could I made my way to the back door and found it was also locked with no key in evidence. For a moment I thought of rousing the household for another key and then I realized that if it were Edith Lowry out there in the night, it would better be kept between ourselves. Stepping to one of the casement windows I unlatched it and slipped through it to the soft ground below. Pushing it to, but leaving a crack to reopen it when I returned I made my way out onto the drive.

The great iron gates were closed so it was not likely that anyone had made their way out to the road. Peering through the dark tunnel of trees that covered the drive in the direction of the Manor I strained my eyes for some sign of a moving figure. I thought I glimpsed something quite a distance up and started off in pursuit.

I kept to the soft ground at the side of the roadway so that my footsteps would not be heard and as an added precaution I turned up the collar of my jacket to prevent any white from my collar or shirt showing through the darkness. I had not gone far before I was certain that there was someone just ahead of me. That someone was a woman and the swing of the figure as it hurried along told me it was Edith Lowry.

I could have hurried to her side or called to her, but

that would have ended her progress toward the Manor. In letting her complete her errand I might learn what it was that she would not tell me. Surely the errand that would make her dress and go out at this hour would be interesting.

Without hesitating or looking back she left the woods and struck out directly across the terraces toward the Manor. This made it difficult for me for if she glanced back she would certainly see me following her. The light of the new moon was bright enough for that. So I decided on and took a different course, running along the edge of the woods careful to keep in their shadow. This would bring me to the land side of the Manor before she reached it across the terraces.

She was always in view and as I ran along I watched her progress with the result that I had one or two painful stumbles. As a matter of fact I reached the Manor quite a little ahead and crept along the front wall, in its shadow, to a point as near to the front door as I dared. Here I stood motionless, waiting to see what course she would take.

As she approached the next to the last terrace I noticed she was not making for the Manor at all, but rather was following a course that would bring her to the edge of the cliffs. The edge of the cliffs! My blood ran cold in my veins and all of the puzzling emotions she aroused in me crystallized into one strong desire. She must not be allowed to reach the edge of those cliffs!

Forgetting the moonlight—forgetting the owl that

hooted at people who came to this forsaken spot in the night—forgetting all of the elaborate warnings I dashed off the terrace with its protecting shadow and ran like mad to head her off. I had covered about half the distance to the spot she seemed to be heading for when she apparently saw me, for she waved one arm high above her head and quickened her steps.

Then I suddenly realized what it all meant! She was heading for the clump of trees in which Hooper had been struck down. She had waved at me not because she recognized me, but because she had mistaken me for someone else—the someone that she was coming to meet. Quickly I veered so that the trees would come between us, and then in the shadow of them I halted to collect my thoughts. Far below the waves beat against the rocks and they seemed to be pounding into my brain the phrase, "she is meeting him—she is meeting him!"

In the next few moments my brain raced through a dozen lines of new thought. Suppose she came here to meet a man she loved—a man whom she could meet nowhere else? If Hooper had come upon him suddenly as he waited for her might he not strike out in self defense? But the buckets he had carried, and the fact that he had disappeared so mysteriously, and the owl's calls! When she had heard the last she had trembled in fear, not as a girl would tremble at the call of her lover—or had I been mistaken? Then the letter beside Hooper's body. That was sinister and not the result of any clandestine tryst.

One thing I did know. In a moment she would be in this small clump of trees and waiting to meet her, or on his way here at any moment, was the person who signed himself "the spirit of Burnleigh Manor." Speculation was futile and fruitless. I could hide here in the deep shadow and listen. If it were truly a sweetheart tryst I could steal away without shameless eavesdropping. If it were not, and what I heard led me to believe I had stumbled on the thing that held her in a grip of fear, then I could settle this whole affair once and for all. Strangely, as I waited I prayed that it was the latter. Rather close grips with this strange person from the Manor, than the knowledge that her heart was in someone else's hands. Further thought ended abruptly.

From a spot not many feet way—in fact I could have sworn it came from the very spot I had found Hooper—the soft hoot of an owl wandered off across the silence of the night. It was answered on the far side of the woods from me and then I heard Edith Lowry's voice low and tense.

"Don't you think it reckless to dash along the cliff that way?"

There was the low murmur of a man's voice, too low for me to catch any of it.

"But I just saw you running—oh!"

The murmur came again and I tried moving closer along the edge of the wood to see if I could catch the words. Edith's voice came again, still hushed, but with a new note of alarm.

"No! No! I was mistaken! There was no one. It could not have been him for I locked everyone in the Lodge! Please, please, listen to me a moment!"

I could not hear any of the man's conversation. His voice was deep and soft and for some reason did not carry in my direction. I knew what he had said by her reply. Hearing that she had seen someone running along the cliff he knew that they were being watched by that someone. Guessing that it was me he had evidently threatened to come after me and she had then tried to quiet him by telling him she was mistaken. I decided to bring the matter to a head by a face to face encounter, and cautiously feeling my way I entered the wood.

Her voice, slightly raised and agitated came to me again.

"I warn you I shall shout a warning to him!"

Then a murmured reply.

"I will, but only if you will come with me. What are you doing? No! Not that—please! Please! Not again!"

There was a stifled scream as if someone had choked it off by putting their hand across her mouth, the sounds of a scuffle, and then silence. It was over in a second but I was on my way through the wood in earnest, stumbling, crashing through branches that cut my face, and making a noise like a bull elephant in the African jungle.

Suddenly from my right I heard Edith Lowry's voice raised in an agonized cry.

"Look out! For God's sake run!"

I wheeled awkwardly and just in time to see a shadowy figure about eight feet away bring his arm down in my direction. I ducked, felt a peculiar tug at my jacket sleeve and started pulling the trigger of my gun, aiming as best I could while off balance. The figure faded into the rest of the trees and silence settled once more over the wood.

As I scrambled to my feet again, I felt a twinge of pain in my arm and something fell at my feet. Stooping, I picked it up and in the half light saw that it was a long and peculiar shaped knife and the blade was stained with something wet. With the knife in one hand and the revolver in the other I charged back and forth through that wood and around it until I was thoroughly exhausted. Edith Lowry and the man she had come to meet were gone, and so help me, this time I knew they had not left it by any means available to me!

Once in the open again, convinced my only course was to go for help, I glanced down at my hand and found it smeared with something that looked black in the moonlight. It was blood, and a jagged cut in my coat sleeve told me that her warning and my accompanying ducking had transferred the target of that thrown knife from my heart to my arm.

A bit weak and trembling from head to foot from the effort and the emotions through which I had raced a second before I started for the Lodge. I was heart sick from the fear of what might have happened to her but I could do nothing more alone.

Then from the woods behind me came that dread sound, clear and strong—the hoot of an owl. I turned in the moonlight and without thinking, emptied the rest of my magazine at a hopeless range and with no aim whatever, in the general direction of the wood.

So far I was not a match for the Spirit of Burnleigh Manor.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WHEN I reached the Lodge I went directly to Hooper's room and found Lowry sitting beside the bed reading. He glanced at me with a worried look.

"Did you hear what sounded like shooting a moment ago?"

"I did, in fact, I did the shooting."

He rose quickly to his feet.

"What!"

"Step out into the hall a moment where we can talk, and bring that basin and bandage with you."

Lighting the light in the hall I took off my jacket and ripping the sleeve from my shirt I exposed a nasty, but entirely flesh wound. While Lowry washed it and bound it up I went over the events in the wood. Before I had finished his hands were trembling.

"It could not have been my daughter, Mr. Riker."

"I hope to Heaven it was not, but——"

He looked at me for a second and then putting his arm over my shoulders drew toward the stairs.

"I cannot rest until I know and I understand your feeling, too. Come, we will see."

There was nothing to do for Hooper, so together we went down into the living room and then to the door of

Edith Lowry's room. Here he knocked. There was no response and his second knocking had something frantic about it. This time there was an answer—a sleepy voice called to him.

"Yes? Who is there?"

Lowry passed a hand across his brow.

"It is I, Edith. Go back to sleep. I just wanted to be sure you were all right."

Then the sleepy voice answered again.

"Very well, daddy."

But I was not satisfied. If she had escaped from whoever had mishandled her there in the wood, she hardly had had time to get back to her room.

"I'll believe it when I see it, Lowry, and not before. That might be anyone in there."

"Nonsense, I know her——"

"Please! This is no time to guess at things!"

I wanted above all things to see Edith Lowry safe and sound. He understood.

"Edith, will you come out a moment?"

"Yes, father. Someone else is with you?"

"Mr. Riker."

"Just a moment."

We stood without moving or speaking until the door of her room opened, and there in that same negligee, sleepy and adorable looking, stood the girl I had seen running across the terraces toward that wood! I stood stupidly staring and she was the first to speak.

"You have been hurt, Mr. Riker?"

"Only a surface cut, thanks to you!"

"Thanks to me?"

Captain Lowry seemed troubled by something and he spoke to her severely:

"Edith, have you been out of the house since you went to your room?"

She avoided my eyes and smiled at him.

"Why, you dear old goose, do I look it?"

He smiled and patted her cheek, but I noticed she had not answered his question. Then she turned to me.

"Step into the light here, Mr. Riker and let me see if I cannot improve on that crude looking bandage."

Lowry spoke up.

"Thanks. I did the bandaging."

"Hush! How did you get this cut?"

Lowry was making his way up to Hooper's room again, and her dark head was bent over my arm. When I spoke it was close to her ear.

"Don't let us pretend together. You were wonderful tonight and I owe my life to you."

She straightened up quickly.

"I guess my father's bandage is all right after all, but I am sure I do not know what you are talking about."

"You mean you were not on the edge of the cliffs tonight?"

She was looking at her hands. So was I and they were not too steady.

"What is it that you and father are harping on?"

"Well, for instance, did you ever see that knife before?"

I indicated the odd oriental looking thing that I had laid on the table when I came in. She did not look and I touched her on the arm.

"Over there on the table, Miss Lowry."

She gave it a hasty glance and I saw her shudder.

"What a horrible looking thing!"

I took her hands in mine and spoke softly.

"Edith, I cannot understand your attitude, but I am willing to assume that you know best about it. However, before anything else happens that may not be so—so minor, I want you to know something."

Her hands struggled loose from mine and she turned away as if weary and reluctant.

"Not tonight—please. Wait until we are both less —less upset."

"Then you *were* in that wood tonight?"

"I was in my bed tonight, and I am going back there with your permission."

But as she turned and started for her door I saw a red bruise across her mouth and one lip was slightly swollen! She could not bring herself to be honest with me even now, but two things that satisfied me were that she was safe again and that she had—at a risk to herself—called out a warning to me.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE morning was a bit hectic. Lowry and I had our breakfast in comparative silence. About the middle of it Burnleigh came down and it seemed as if the entire household was suffering from a definite lack of sleep. Every one was rather glum and irritable. Perhaps it was just the overdose of the Manor to which we had all been exposed.

Hooper was still lying on the bed immobile and for all the World like a corpse. It was gruesome and frightening so that we looked forward to the visit of even our pint size nasty doctor with almost pleasure.

After breakfast I started my packing and had left with the first load of my belongings stored in the back of the Rolls before the doctor arrived. I left my things in the hall and with a grim sort of humor wondered how much of them would be left when I returned with the rest.

Back at the Lodge I found Burnleigh's bags piled by the door. He had been sincere in his declaration of staying up there with me. Upstairs I heard voices in Hooper's room and went on up to hear the verdict. The doctor was sitting beside his bed and the dressing had been removed from the wound.

Burnleigh turned as I entered.

"The doctor says he is still a very sick man—dangerously sick—and has asked if I want to call in a specialist."

"Is there anything a specialist can do with a concussion except rest the patient and guard against complications?"

The doctor glanced at me with his usual sour expression.

"Nothing."

"Then why the question?"

"It is customary to ask, Mr. Riker."

"Well, now that that is over, what are Hooper's chances?"

"Fair. He must be kept quiet—absolutely quiet, and when he finally regains consciousness he must not be allowed to talk or become excited in any way."

That was bad news to me for there were many things I wanted very badly to know from Hooper. What had he been about to find in the wood? What had he seen just before he was struck down? Could he identify his assailant? Why did he whisper that warning against the Master's bedroom with what he thought was his last breath? What did he know or suspect about that special room? All these must remain unanswered until this shriveled bit of medical knowledge permitted them to be asked. Suppose he had reasons of his own for wanting them unanswered? Suppose he kept Hooper under an opiate—but all this was utterly ridiculous. I was getting so that I suspected every living soul of being involved.

On the way down stairs I passed Edith Lowry coming up with a cup of steaming water or soup. She avoided my eyes and ignored my greeting. Paler than I had ever seen her, she looked on the verge of a nervous breakdown. If *only* she would trust me!

Piling the remainder of my things in the Rolls I started for the Manor for the second time that morning. It was quite gratifying to find everything just as I left it. Apparently there was to be no more joking.

By noon I was settled more or less comfortably in the Master's bedroom. This being the one place I had been specifically warned against, I naturally selected it as the one from which I could learn the most. It struck me as a bit funny to think I was to sleep in the room "in which every Lord Burnleigh had slept" while the real Lord Burnleigh occupied the lovely quarters of "every Lady Burnleigh."

Now that we are living in the Manor, perhaps a more careful description of the arrangements of the rooms will help. As I said before, the stairs went up both sides of the great hall to a gallery that ran across the entire back. From each end of the gallery a short flight of stairs led up to a balcony that continued around the right, left and front of the hall, and into which all of the rooms of this part of the second floor opened. In front, and directly over the front doors was Lady Burnleigh's room which Lord Cecil was to occupy. This had no door opening onto the balcony for some peculiar reason—its only entrance being through the Master's bedroom. Next to

this was the room I intended to occupy. It took in the entire corner facing the sea—was directly under the corner that bore the tower of the apparition and was directly over the library on the first floor. It was tremendous, and had a large, heavily studded door opening onto the balcony.

It was no easy task getting our quarters into shape and I was disappointed to see it consume the entire morning. I wanted to get the lighting unit in operation before lunch, but instead it was not until two o'clock that I began that task. By four o'clock I had the motor running quite satisfactorily. Lugging the heavy battery units in from the car was not an easy task and we were pretty well tired out when at last I was ready to throw in the master switch. I checked the wiring rather hastily —unfortunately—and found that only the hall, library and our two master bedrooms were wired for electric lights. The switch in, we went up to survey the result.

It was quite comforting and different to be able to walk about in these rooms brilliantly illuminated. We had to replace a great many bulbs, but at last Burnleigh Manor had thrown off its dark shadows and become like other more modern houses.

Encouraged by the brightness I settled down to a minute examination of the Library in an effort to find the clue of the manner in which the person who had taken my notebook had entered and left. Burnleigh and I were convinced it was a trick of the place not visible to a casual survey. There was not a square inch of the walls

that escaped my examination, both visual and tapping, but supper time caught me without the slightest reward for my efforts. I still had the book cases to examine, however, and I intended to remove every book and check the wall behind as soon as he had finished supper.

On our way back to the Lodge we had our first opportunity to think about what lay ahead. Both of us were a bit keyed up at the thought of coming so closely to grips with the place and no matter how phlegmatic or well balanced a person may be, the idea of sleeping in a house shunned by so many people because of the queer stories told about it—and especially in a room against which you have been specifically warned—gives an excusable thrill.

Perhaps we lingered unnecessarily long over our supper, but at last there was nothing to do but go back. I had left the lights burning in the Manor when we left to check the reliability of the unit, and the old place was quite a sight as we came out of the wood and saw it high above its terraces. I could imagine its old time glory—the days of the gay and lively parties—the homecoming Christmas holidays—in fact it was at the moment difficult to believe the things I had already learned of its peculiarity. Then came the first greeting of the evening.

We had crossed the first terrace and started up the second when faintly from somwhere about the Manor came that familiar sound, the hoot of an owl. As the last note died away the house was plunged in darkness. Burnleigh stopped short.

"Gad, Riker, the lights are gone!"

It had jolted me somewhat, but it had annoyed me a great deal more.

"It's not necessary to throw a fit over that. Either the unit has broken down or else some kind soul has pulled out the master switch."

"Suppose we wait until morning to find out?"

"Not a chance!"

"Then why not go back to the Lodge for the others?"

I shook myself free of his restraining hand.

"You can go back if you wish, but I am going to have a talk with this certain party that is supplying all the thrills."

I continued up the terraces until I stood before the front door. Burnleigh had followed reluctantly and was now standing at my side.

"I think this is fool-hardy of you Riker, for we haven't even a flashlight!"

Actually I did want to go back. The automatic in my pocket had just one shell left in it if I had counted right after my little engagement of last night in the wood. If I had not counted right I had an empty gun—and no light. However, my natural stubbornness would not permit me to make a move that might, by the greatest stretch of the imagination, be twisted into the least semblance of a retreat.

I felt about in my pockets and drew out three or four matches. Unlocking the padlock as quietly as possible, I opened the door and went in a few paces. There was

not a sound except Burnleigh's breathing at my side. After a second or two had passed in this manner I lighted a match and held it at arm's length from my side. There was no response to this, so I assumed we were alone in the hall and made my way boldly to the oil lamp on the table.

When it had ceased its sputtering and settled down to a steady light, the first thing that it illuminated for me was a sheet of paper lying close to its base. Burnleigh saw it about the same moment and we bent down together to read.

"There is really no need for a postscript to my first note, but it is with real regret that I see you have not heeded it. I shall give you one half hour to change your minds. I am also returning Mr. Riker's flashlight. He left it behind last night—in the excitement!"

Burnleigh tried a weak sort of smile.

"Apparently we have a sort of—of armistice for the present."

I think I managed a grin. As a matter of fact I was quite sincere about it for it was a relief to know just when the fire works could be expected to start. I answered him in a voice calculated to reach anyone who might be listening on the shadowy balconies.

"We can get a lot done in a half hour!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

After our examination of the note showed us that it was written on the same paper with the crest of Robert Burnleigh, but in a hand that defied any identification, I picked up the flashlight and leaving Burnleigh standing in the hall went down to the cellar to examine my lighting outfit. No damage seemed to have been done, someone had simply pulled out the master switch. Today, my greater experience would have led to a minute examination of the handle of that switch for finger prints. All that I did that night, however, was throw it back and breathe a sigh of relief when the pilot light glowed telling me that upstairs was once more bright.

I had unconsciously carried the letter down in my hand, and turning it over I scribbled this message and left it hanging on the handle:

"Pull this out again and I will know where to find you!"

When I reached the hall again Burnleigh was pacing up and down.

"Well, my boy, shall we sit and talk a while before we—we go to bed?"

The old chap had plenty of courage. We sat and

talked about anything and everything to keep our morale up, but the main object of attention for me was the progress of the minute hand about the face of my wrist watch. Something about the place made it difficult to keep up any sort of conversation and gradually we found ourselves lapsing into silence. During one of these pauses Burnleigh suddenly leaned forward in his chair.

"Did you hear that?"

I glanced at my watch and saw that our half hour was up. Every old house has its creaks and cracklings and so far I had heard nothing unusual, but I sat rigid at his question with that intent feeling of listening when it seems as if one's ears were actually stretching out feelers to catch the least whisp of sound. Then I did hear someone gently tapping at the front door.

I reached in my pocket for the little automatic, and with that in one hand and the flashlight in the other I approached the door. Turning the handle slowly and as silently as possible I threw it open quickly. There was no one there—but—someone came in! I could hear someone walk past me, but I could not see them!

They were slow footsteps as if made by someone carrying a heavy load and they were going in the direction of the stairs on my left. Burnleigh had risen and stood straining his eyes in the very direction that I thought I heard them going so I knew it was not my imagination. They reached the stairs and started to go up—slowly and evenly. When they had reached a point about half way up I shook off the peculiar feeling of

dread that had kept me rooted to the spot by the doors, and I ran across the hall. Taking the steps two at a time I finally felt I was walking beside our invisible visitor. I reached out my arms but there was nothing there but air. The footsteps led me to the landing. Here they turned left down the hallway toward the Master's bedroom, and Burnleigh called out from the hall below.

"Riker! Come back! It is trying to separate us! Don't let it lead you away from me!"

I did stop, but I heard those slow shuffling footsteps go up to the door of my bedroom and without hesitation go on through my closed door! Old Hooper had warned me against that room and my ghostly friend had made directly for it. I had a strong feeling that my slumbers were not to go undisturbed.

I joined Burnleigh again. He was pale and trembling. I was not too steady, but I tried to reassure him.

"Of course there is some simple explanation for that."

"My brother never found it, Riker."

"On the contrary I think he did. I think he knew all about it. I think Hooper does too and before the night is out perhaps I will myself!"

Burnleigh shook his head slowly and the glances he kept sending about the place had a haunted quality about them.

"What was it you told me on the boat that Edward said when he heard those footsteps?"

Burnleigh's voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"He said—'why can't she rest?' "

"What did he mean by that?"

Burnleigh's eyes burned when he turned them back to me.

"Nothing, probably, he was insane at the time."

"Sane or not, that means that he had a definite explanation for all this in his mind."

"I cannot agree with you."

He had turned his back on me and was playing with something on the table with nervous fingers.

"Were the footsteps we heard tonight like those you heard that Christmas Eve?"

"I suppose so. One's judgment cannot be trusted at moments like that."

"I don't see why not. It seems to me that I would be able to identify footsteps as peculiar as those we just heard."

He sank into the chair and covered his face with hands that trembled as if with the palsy.

"Perhaps you would. I am sorry to say my memory is not as good as yours."

I thought I heard the footsteps again, far away and with a quicker beat. Hooper's warning and the course of the footsteps made me anxious to get into that bedroom. I was about to mention turning in when Burnleigh spoke.

"You are not going to stay here now, of course, after——"

"After the first attempt to scare me off? I certainly am!"

Burnleigh leaped to his feet and stood listening. From somewhere in the house came a slow rhythmic sound as if someone were attempting to batter down a stone wall with a heavy hammer. It was so muffled that a true description was difficult but it certainly sounded like steel on stone. I grasped Burnleigh by the hand.

"Come on, let's locate that sound!"

He looked at me appealingly.

"I simply cannot tonight. The sound that you hear, Riker, is a confirmation of the old legend."

"What old legend?"

"The one that tells of a tortured and imprisoned soul that constantly attempts to batter its way to freedom from this ghastly wreck of a place."

"And I suppose you believe that rot?"

"It is not a question of belief, but there certainly will be no sleep for us here tonight. I cannot stay in this hideous place any longer!"

He swayed where he stood and but for my arm would probably have fallen. His voice came in a whisper between clenched teeth.

"Won't you take me back to the Lodge?"

So Burnleigh Manor won the first real encounter. We slept that night in the Lodge.

As I closed and locked the door through which our invisible friend had entered I could still hear the steady, tireless beat of that mysterious hammer in the hands of our unknown workman.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

LORD BURNLEIGH was not at all well the next morning. The incident of the night before was too much for nerves already taut. I remained with him for some time after breakfast, due to the fact that he seemed very anxious that I should wait until he felt better before going back to the Manor. Any argument merely made him worse so I gave in. When I finally did get away from his room it was on the excuse that I wished to see how Hooper was coming on.

I did want to see Hooper, but what I wanted desperately more than that was to talk to him. His room was still darkened and he still lay stretched out frightfully immobile. His color was better, however, and everyone was more hopeful. I was startled by a voice at my back.

"I thought I told everyone that the patient was not to be disturbed!"

I turned and saw the little doctor, his eyes fairly blazing. I had heard no car draw up and no footsteps behind me.

"I have not disturbed your patient. I have more or less right to, however, on matters of importance."

I wanted him to know that I was determined.

"How important?"

"Very important."

"What about?"

His insolence was superb.

"That happens to be my business."

"How the devil can I tell whether it is important enough to risk my patient's health—if it is your business? You do not seem to realize how sick he has been since—since his fall."

The emphasis on "fall" was inescapable.

"There is no telling when he will be able to listen, let alone talk, but I'll let you know as soon as I can. Now if——"

I walked out of the room when he began his examination and out of the Lodge. The sun was warm and the day pleasant and I decided to take the remainder of the morning walking about the grounds. I also did a bit of thinking.

Luncheon was cooked and served by two domestics that had just arrived. Edith Lowry had not been in evidence all morning, the report being that she was confined to her bed with a bad headache. Her rest cure was short for the new domestics finished the meal, heard one or two rumors about the place from someone who never admitted telling them, and promptly went back to the city. After lunch Lowry and I strolled down the walk and out on the drive.

He was smoking his pipe and looked the picture of a commonplace, trustworthy army officer. I had a sudden impulse and followed it.

"Lowry, I want to do a bit of unusual work at the Manor this afternoon and I wonder if you will help me?"

We turned our steps toward the Manor and for the first part of the walk I endeavored to determine in my own mind just how much of it all I could tell him with safety. He must not drop an unconscious hint to his daughter.

"Frankly, Lowry, all that I want you for this afternoon is company—just sit around in case I should need help while I do a bit of examining. I would not want you to even mention the fact that you were up there with me."

"Very well, sir, as you wish."

What I wanted to do that afternoon was to test every inch of the walls and stairway of the Hall to see how the "ghost walking" trick of the night before had been done. I could not very well go about on hands and knees without some explanation to the man.

"I have reason to believe that there is something peculiar about the construction of that place, Lowry."

That seemed to satisfy him and once in the Hall he sat down in the arm chair and lighted his pipe again.

"This about right, sir?"

And with an amused smile he watched me crawling about, poking here and there, and tapping every reachable point on the left hand side of the hallway.

An hour passed without my having found the least trace of the sort of thing for which I was looking. It is one thing to look about for something you suspect, but here I was looking for something I actually knew existed

and still I was entirely baffled. The walls and woodwork were of a soundness that should have delighted the heart of the most fastidious of architects.

Someone had given the impression of walking across this hall and up the stairs without doing it. The answer was simple. They had walked through a passage somewhere, duplicating the sounds. But if the acoustics of this hidden place were good enough to transmit the sound out so realistically I could not understand why they did not respond to my test soundings.

I gave up the walls and the floor and turned my attention to the staircase. This was naturally more difficult as I could no longer rely on sound to guide me. I had crawled three quarters of the way up when a voice from the doorway stopped me.

"Looking for something?"

The doctor stood leaning against the door frame with a broad but humorless smile. I must have been an amusing sight, sprawled at full length, poking my nose into every corner and suspicious looking crevice.

"No, my dear doctor. Just studying English architecture."

"At close range."

"Oh, quite."

If he had ever annoyed me he certainly did now!

"Hooper may be able to talk to you for a moment in the morning. I expect him to be conscious then."

Even that did not appease my feeling.

"Thanks for walking all the way up here to tell me that."

The sarcasm went over his head entirely.

"No trouble. Needed the exercise. Now I will leave you to your—your studies. You are certainly a close student, Mr. Riker."

With a laugh that had a nasty sound to it he left. I turned on Lowry with a tart remark about his not letting me know we had a visitor.

"You know, Mr. Riker, you *do* look a bit funny crawling about up there."

If the purpose of my search were known to him, would I still seem so amusing? Then I was chagrined to find the afternoon gone with nothing accomplished. I had wanted to inspect the library bookcases also—and the bedroom. Now there was no time. The bedroom drew me and I decided that before I went back I would take at least a hurried glimpse about it.

It certainly was just an ordinary looking room. Whoever had built into Burnleigh Manor its secrets had made a craftsman-like job of it. Perhaps my best course was to wait for a bit of carelessness on the part of whoever it was behind it all, and if I were to get an accidental clue there could be no better place than this room. Hooper had warned me against it and the footsteps had gone into it. I closed the door on it with the firm resolve that I would sleep that night where all "the other Lord Burnleighs had slept."

On the way back I cautioned Lowry again against talking.

I took Burnleigh's supper to him myself. As darkness fell his nervousness seemed to increase. I kept the conversation in general channels but I could see that he was not attentive.

"I am frightfully glad we are not up there tonight, Riker. It was a foolish thing to think about. I am going to try and get a good night's rest and hope you will do likewise. Tomorrow we can talk to Hooper."

I avoided committing myself and after chatting a little longer I left him on the pretense of a walk. On the way out I had collected by hat, my flashlight and my gun—which I had reloaded. Encountering no one as I went out I turned directly toward the Manor. There was no one able enough, or trustworthy enough, to assist me in the task I had set for myself this night, so it was up to me to go it alone. Not even to Lowry would I dare impart the information necessary to make him a helper.

I would have liked to follow the edge of the woods to the shore side of the house and so come upon it unobserved, but I had an instinctive feeling that the moment I left the Lodge the news of my coming was known. I was not surprised therefore, when, on stepping from the woods into the clear to hear that confounded hoot of an owl.

I kept boldly on, however, let myself in the front doors, and settled down for a few moments in the arm chair after lighting the lights. As an afterthought I

also lighted the oil lamp, for which I was later very grateful. Then placing the revolver where it would be handy to me on the table, I sat waiting for the first move of my mysterious host, or failing that, for the approach of bed time.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE place was cold—a musty cold that we had been unable to dispel. As I sat there in my lonely vigil I kept assuring myself that it was this causing the involuntary shivers to run up and down my spinal chord every now and then. Unfelt draughts sighed through the old hall. A creak from a stair tread, or a sudden sound from some distant part of the house would bring me up erect and tense in my chair. I could appreciate the night after night solitude of Edward. The only miracle was that he had not gone insane before he had.

I began to suspect I was somewhat of a plain variety of fool. Analyzing things truthfully the only two reasons for my being here were vanity at my inability to fathom the house and stubborness. For lack of anything better I concentrated my attention on the cobwebs that had been spun about the chandelier directly over my head, but this only seemed to make my sense of hearing keener. Perhaps I sat in this uninviting atmosphere for an hour before I heard the sound that I had been subconciously waiting to hear.

Against the stout panels of the front door I heard once more the soft tapping of the ghostly knuckles. Listening carefully I realized that it was impossible to say

whether they actually were rapping on the door or not, but this time I determined to establish the spectral qualities of our visitor and also to inform him what my attitude would be from now on. Resting the revolver on the table I carefully sighted along the barrel until I was sure that I was covering the spot on which it seemed his knuckles were falling. I pulled the trigger.

The report sounded like the explosion of an H. E. shell and it echoed and reverberated through the empty hall and rooms until it seemed as if I had touched off a whole magazine. When the last echo had died away the house was plunged in darkness. Then it was that I was thankful for the oil lamp.

I quickly slipped out of the circle of its light and endeavored to listen over the thumping of my own heart. Slowly and steadily the tapping continued at the door. I could see the splintered board where my bullet had buried itself and knew that either the thing did not have puncturable qualities or else the shot had not gone clear through. There was one thing I could do—determine which of the two were true—and I could not stand that steady tapping much longer.

I crept as silently as possible through the semi-darkness until my hand rested on the knob of the door. I could hardly see my hand and evidently if I were to do any more shooting it would have to be done in this murky gloom. I knew that I could never muster the courage to go down into that cellar to look at the lighting plant. Cautiously I began to turn the handle—and

then before I could open the door I heard those weary phantom footsteps—across the hall—to the stairs.

I slipped off my shoes and followed them. Up the stairs we went, side by side, my invisible visitor and I. At the top it turned an started down the hall exactly as it had done the night before. This time I followed, feeling my way in the darkness. Even though I could not bring myself to believe there was anyone near me, I felt it would be unwise to use my flashlight and thus expose my exact position.

At the door of the Master's bedroom the footsteps seemed to hesitate a moment, and then I heard them once more, fainter and in the room. My friend had passed through this closed door also!

Cautiously I pushed open the door and turned on my flashlight. Even though I was prepared, it gave me a chill feeling to find the room empty—everything in order and just as I had left it. The footsteps had stopped. I went to the bed and snapped the lamp switch. There was no response, but just as I drew my hand away the room was suddenly filled with light and blinking, I swung about to face the door. Evidently my ghost was twins. One in the cellar with the light switch and one somewhere about the room with me, or do the inhabitants of the spectral world supply energy to wires by a simple wave of the hand?

For what seemed an age I stood waiting for the next move. So far I had learned nothing, but I knew that if I kept on stubbornly now, something would occur that

would give me an inkling into the workings and identity of this nocturnal visitor. It had led me to the spot against which I had been warned. That was probably for a good reason. We had to meet soon. Closing the door again I sat down on the bed.

It was quiet enough now—too awfully quiet. I began to imagine I could feel someone looking at me. It was a creepy, unpleasant feeling to be spied upon from somewhere without being able to locate the spot. Then the thought occurred to me that I must look utterly ridiculous sitting on the edge of the bed holding a pair of shoes in one hand and gazing off at nothing. I decided to make a bluff at being nonchalant and unaffected by the demonstration so far.

Deliberately I placed my shoes under the bed. This gave me an excuse to look there carefully. Then I took off my coat and vest and going to the wardrobe closet (the only one in the room) I opened the door and hung them up. The closet seemed harmless enough but I left the door open. Next came the collar and tie which I tossed on the dresser. Assuring myself that the door to Lady Burnleigh's room was locked I pulled down the blankets with as careless a gesture as I could muster under the circumstances and actually stretched out on my back as if to sleep.

My gun I placed under the pillow in a handy position. My flashlight went on the table beside the head of the bed. Then I lay back listening. Not a sound, even the creakings seemed to have stopped. Just the distant

rumble of the surf. Perhaps a half hour passed this way.

I was actually studying every detail of the room and one thing fascinated me. There was a raised, rather grotesque fresco around the top of the walls about a foot from the ceiling. A large and ornate shield, then a sort of wavy band leading to a coronet, more wavy band and then another shield, and so on all about the room. I remembered reading a long time ago about a diabolical room in which the victim was studied through just such a raised fresco. If that was the case here, it was cleverly hidden for I examined each part of this one in turn.

My imagination was reaching that stage of activity that makes of any place a torture chamber. I imagined I felt someone standing behind my bed. I knew it was against the wall between the boarded up windows, but suppose there was a sliding panel there—and someone had opened it and was standing there now waiting to brain me if I moved? I could feel the slow movement as they raised their arm for the blow. In a second it would come—and then from below me I heard a sound that brought me sitting straight upright in bed! The same sound of a steel hammer on stone! The tortured soul at work on its prison.

Immediately I sensed a blessed revulsion of feeling, the sanity that puts us back on balance again. What utter bosh! Prisoned soul indeed. Even in that moment of clarifying sanity, however, from some dim spot in my memory came a legend of supposedly unfortunate beings

doomed to hover about a certain spot until their bodies were released. I shook myself mentally and physically and got up. The inactivity had been breaking down my nerve. Here was the next move. Now to find the new performer and his stage.

It sounded as if it came from the floor below so I quietly crept down the stairs. The lights were on in the hall and it was as empty as ever. The sound of the muffled blows of the hammer were a little louder now. They seemed to be coming from the direction of the library. I walked along the hall until I stood in front of the library door. I certainly was getting nearer. Cautiously turning the knob I swung the door in. The sound was quite loud and distinct now, and yet it did not seem to come from the room itself. I felt for the button of my flashlight and found my hands were wet and clammy. I dried off my right one and with a firm hold on the light I turned it on and swept the room. It was empty enough and showed no occupancy since I had left it. Stepping in as silently as I knew how, I put my hand on the light switch and waited.

The blows were quite regular now—a steady thump, thump, thump, of a heavy hammer hitting solid stone. Occasionally I could hear a softer sound as if a piece of rock chipped off had fallen. I counted with the blows and snapped on the lights exactly with one of them.

I think my ears must have literally stood out with the effort I made to definitely locate that sound. It was coming from below and to the left of where I stood.

That put it in the wall furthest from the hall, or somewhere beyond—perhaps on the outside of the house altogether! I tiptoed in my stocking feet to the wall and pressed my ear against it. In that way I could hear very distinctly. Someone was unquestionably hammering away at stones not very far away from where I stood. I decided on a rather foolish test to determine the nearness of the eerie worker.

Just after one of the blows I knocked on the wall. There was absolute silence for a second. I had stopped the hammering with a gentle tap, so it could not be very far away. Then I felt, rather than heard, a rustling movement on the other side of the wall from where I had my ear pressed. Someone was standing on the opposite side listening, like myself. I knew that at that moment the mystery of Burnleigh Manor was separated from me by only the thickness of a stone wall!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I STOOD there, tense, listening, until my nerves would not permit inactivity another second. The wall fascinated me. There *must* be a way to reach that rustling something on the other side. My fingers searched desperately for a suspicious roughness, and my eyes strained for the least sign of a crack. I had moved about three feet from where my ear had been pressed when from above me, apparently from the room I had just left, came the dull thud of something falling—a pause and then the same sound again—then silence. My ghost had transferred its activity to the second floor, so to the second floor I went. The humor of a humdrum architect playing tag upstairs and down, with a supposed ghost in a supposedly haunted house did not occur to me at the moment and would have had little appeal if it had.

As I approached the door I could see that the lights were still on in the bedroom. Peering around the corner and finding the room empty I made my way to the bed at once, for I had carelessly left my gun under the pillow. It was still there and not a thing had been disturbed in the room as far as I could determine. I looked around for what I had heard and found nothing. I know now

that my powers of observation were not up to average that night, but I think I can be excused.

Sitting on the edge of the bed I listened for the next sound in this wild goose chase and tried to think. The place was absolutely quiet now. After making sure that it was a perfectly sound wall at the head of my bed I decided to husband my energy and stretched out on it. I even pulled a blanket over me against the chill of the room. At least I could rest until the performance was continued. I could start tearing down those walls, and might as well make up my mind to do it, but I still hoped I could figure it out without that destruction.

So I remained for an hour or so, stiff from the tension, every sense strained to the breaking point. I realized in that period of inactivity how weary I actually was—especially nervously and mentally. To keep my mind occupied I tried counting the number of shields in the fresco, then the coronets and back to the shields again. It was a fatal mistake on my part, for the rythm of counting together with the reaction of my weariness, allowed me to doze off even in this weird place.

Perhaps it was only a moment, perhaps it was an hour—but all that I remember is that I was suddenly awake, very much awake, and that my room was now in darkness. I had left the lights burning when I stretched out and now they were out! I had a wild desire to leap out of bed which I choked back with a more sensible restraint.

I could feel the hair on the back of my neck like so

many pin pricks—and along my arms. My upper lip was damp with perspiration and so was my forehead. Then I heard a stealthy movement about in the center of the room—again—there was no question about it, I was not alone!

Now was the time for action! It was a blessed relief to know that no wall seperated me from that sound in the darkness. My hand slid cautiously and silently under the pillow for that efficient little automatic. It was gone! That something in the room had leaned over me and taken it from under my head while I had dozed! Perhaps it had been that which awakened me.

I was in a nice jam now. No gun—my legs tangled in a blanket—and then I thought of my light. If this was going to be a hand to hand struggle I at least was to see who or what it was with which I was dealing. After all that was the most important thing of all—the one thing we most wanted to know—and I was here to see. I reached out my hand carefully again, and I found that the light was gone too! I must have become panicky then and jerked my hand back too quickly, for it struck the lamp with a noisy jangle.

From the other side of the room the answer to that sound was a sarcastic laugh—eerie and unreal in the darkness—and I felt a sudden cold and damp current of air, as if a door to a cellar had been opened. Then from the inkiness of the room came a voice.

"You will find your light in the library. The gun I think is safer with me. Had my visit been left with me

you would not have had any further use for either. Next time—if you are so foolish and stubborn to let there be a next time—it will be quite different—oh, quite different."

Again that mirthless laugh, followed by a soft metallic click and then silence. I lay there frozen with fear. While I had slept like a stupid fool, the Spirit of Burnleigh Manor had stood above me with my gun in its hand. The one who had struck Hooper down had had me entirely at his mercy and then with a sarcastic laugh had gone, for even in the darkness I knew that I was alone. I was living because it "had not been left" with whoever had visited me.

Then all other thoughts were swept from my mind by a sudden overwhelming realization! The voice that had spoken to me out of the darkness had been Burnleigh's! I had never heard him laugh but I knew instinctively that eerie one would be identical with his. No question about it—every intonation, every pronounciation had been the same. I was simply staggered by the thought. I could not doubt what I had heard even though common sense cried out against it!

I had an abrupt desire to get out of the place—to get away from it and the bewildering thoughts of the last few moments. I kicked the blankets from my legs and sat up. At the same instant the lights were turned on in the room leaving me almost blinded.

When my eyes had accustomed themselves to the glare, I saw that my shoes were lying side by side at my feet

ready to step into. On the foot of my bed was my coat neatly folded, and on top of it lay my collar and tie. On the table beside me lay a key. I slipped into my things and went to the door. It was locked! Locked and the key placed on the table. My gun had been taken, my clothes arranged in the neatest sort of invitation to get out quickly, and then whoever had done it had vanished from the room, locking the door and leaving the key on the *inside* of the room. The heart breaking thought was that I was as far from the secret as ever—*except* that I now knew who could tell me!

I unlocked the door, literally ran down the stairs and out into the cool night air. I did not stop until I reached the edge of the cliffs. Glancing at my watch I found it was four in the morning.

There I stayed until the sun came up over the horizon in the cold dawn. With the slow sighing sound of the surf below me and the sharp, biting wind from the sea in my face I sat and juggled the pieces of this crazy puzzle until some of them seemed to click into place. In those dreary hours on the edge of the cliffs that had looked down on pirate ships with their bloody decks I thought out a course of action that finally led me to the heart of the whole thing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IT WILL be easier for you sitting quietly by your fireside to fit the pieces into a logical pattern, than it was for me in that forbidding place, nerves on edge, with the black bulk of the Manor at my back. I was still partly stunned by the fact that the voice had been Burnleigh's.

I ran back over the whole thing, the past history of the place—the story of the man who had died by his own hand, driven mad by years of the same sort of experiences I had just had—and the disappearance of his lovely wife and younger brother that still remained unexplained. I asked myself why I was here at all, and the answer was because the malign influence of the place had become active after a rest of years—or so I had been told. By whom? By the man whose voice had come out of the darkness to me an hour or so ago.

What purpose could he have in bringing me miles across the ocean and threatening my life because I did his bidding? Was he another Doctor Jekyl and Mr. Hyde? He certainly had impressed me at one time as being eccentric.

Against that line of thought I had the word of the caretaker and his daughter. They, too, had seen evi-

dences of whatever cursed the Manor—or at least they told me they had? Were they in on it too?

It *was* possible that Cecil Burnleigh was behind the whole thing. He could have driven his brother mad with his weird manifestations. He could have actually killed him and faked the suicide, trumping up the whole story he told me. Then, wishing to come back after a safe interval of time to reap the harvest of his crime, he had brought me back with him to add a dramatic touch and semblance of truth to his rôle of the neglected and innocent brother. A murderer is supposed to always return to the scene of his crime and perhaps he was afraid to come alone. This would explain Edith Lowry's attitude also. She had probably found him out and lived in hourly terror of what he might do. He was at our side most of the time and if she breathed a word of his secret he could strike her father and me down before we realized what had happened. That might explain the fear that lay deep in her eyes.

Yet when we had heard the footsteps in the hall he had been at my side and if he had been feigning the dread and fear that was on his face at the time he was an actor of no mean skill. All other events had occurred at times when I had no idea of his whereabouts, however. I realized about here that I would get nowhere in my search for the truth unless I examined each detail in turn.

First had come the attack on Hooper and the note left by his body. These were tangible facts that I knew

something about. There was no doubt in my mind that the old fellow had been struck down because he had found something out, and something it was important that no one should know. It was possible Burnleigh had done this but—*two* owls had signalled back and forth that night. He must have an accomplice. I tried to complete what Hooper had started to say that night, but it was no use.

Then the knocking at the front door of the ghostly knuckles. I do not believe in wandering spirits any more than any other healthy, normal person, but there had been no one there when the door was opened. Could Burnleigh have produced the effect by tapping on the table or floor?

Next after the knocking came the footsteps, the tramping of the unseen something across the hall and up the stairs, or had they, too, only sounded as if they had gone up and actually originated in the room? Had they been Burnleigh's feet on the floor? Then why had he cried out not to follow them?

The incident of the bedroom bore a strong resemblance to that of the library. Someone could enter the bedroom without worrying about locks and doors just as they could the library. It was dangerous ground for the imagination and I held mine in check, but the voice—the laugh—the cold clammy air had been real.

Then one seemingly small detail began to loom up larger in my mind—that soft metallic click that had shut off the cold draught and the feeling that someone was in

the room with me. I realized that in that moment, had I been able to light the room, I would have seen the opening that led to the heart of the whole mystery. I tried desperately to recall the direction from which the sound had come. Under the circumstances I think I can be forgiven for not remembering. If there really was a passage in the wall, and it led near the stairs, connecting the library with the bedroom, the whole thing was cleared up. If such a passage existed, the hammer and chisel would show it up before another dawn.

I decided to do three things at once—talk to Hooper—start tearing into the walls of the Manor—and communicate with Scotland Yard. The latter I had no theoretical right to do, but things had passed the theoretical state. With Burnleigh involved I wanted some protection. The fact that it did not occur to me to pack up my things and get out was probably due to the fact that I was too incensed at the treatment I had received and also to a subconscious realization that I could never get away from the place alive until I had made it safe.

No one was stirring at the Lodge when I returned so I went quietly to my room, changed and shaved. I felt refreshed although I knew the lack of sleep would tell on me before the day was out. There was no indication of anyone being about when I had finished either, so I tiptoed to Hooper's room and opened the door.

He lay back on his pillows, pale and waxen. He was either asleep or still unconscious, and I had turned and was about to go when I heard a whisper behind me. I

glanced back at the bed and saw that he was weakly beckoning me nearer. I stepped to his side and leaning down, spoke to him softly.

"I thought you were asleep, Hooper. Just dropped in to see how you are and——"

"My head, sir, it's awful—awful."

His eyes roved about the room and then came to rest on mine again.

"I know how it must hurt, Hooper. It was a wicked blow."

"It isn't the blow that upsets it! It's the rest of it——"

A flush had come into his cheek and his eyes had grown unnaturally bright. I remembered that the doctor had said he must not become excited.

"Never mind trying to talk, old man. The Doc said you would have to be careful. If you'll lie there quietly and answer some questions by nodding, I'll stay. Otherwise I will have to go again."

He nodded his head and one of his hands grasped my wrist as if to keep me from going.

"I spent the night in the Master's bedroom at the Manor."

His eyes opened wide and he half rose from the bed.

"Oh, no sir!"

"I told you I would stay only if you lie there quietly."

He sank back again.

"Very well, sir, but did you——"

"I'll do the questioning, Hooper, but I'll answer that

one of yours. I heard that warning you whispered to me in the woods and because of it I knew that it would pay me to investigate."

"You are all right, sir? Unharmed?"

"Absolutely, except for a strong desire to ask you some questions."

His hand on my wrist trembled.

"I—I hoped you would come."

"First of all, you found something interesting in that wood just before you were struck down, didn't you?"

"Yes sir. In another moment I think I would have——"

But my mind was tortured by Burnleigh's voice in that dark room.

"Did you see the person who hit you?"

"No, sir. All I could see——"

His eyes were lighting up again.

"Hooper, if you do not confine yourself to yes and no, I'll have to go. You forget you are still a sick man."

"Very well."

He lay back, but I knew he was straining for the next question.

"In the time you were with Edward Burnleigh, did you ever hear tapping at the front door?"

He gave me a surprised glance.

"Why—yes sir."

"When you opened the door—was there always someone there?"

"Of course, sir."

That set me back for a moment. Apparently the knocking was a new trick of our ghost.

"But you did hear things in those days—things not easy to explain?"

"Yes—I——"

"Footsteps?"

He nodded eagerly.

"Footsteps that sounded a bit—well, ghostly, and that went up the stairs and along the hall?"

"Exactly!"

"Ever hear them anywhere else in the house?"

"Yes."

"The library?"

"Yes, sir."

"The bedroom?"

"Yes."

Then our ghost was someone alive and active years ago in the same place. Burnleigh?

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Sometimes it seemed——"

"Yes or no, Hooper?"

He looked at me steadily a moment.

"No!"

"Now listen to me carefully. Has it ever occurred to you that there might be a secret passage in the Manor?"

"Yes. I know——"

"Have you any other reason besides the footsteps to make you think that?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea where these passages might be?"

His eyes were gleaming now.

"Yes!"

"Well, then I think we had better waive the 'yes' and 'no' rule for a moment and let you tell me in as few words as possible what you know."

"For one thing, sir, there is a passage from a panel in the library to a similar panel in the bedroom but——"

That checked my conclusions. The disappearance of my note book—the visit in the bedroom would be simple. It was evident that *one* person would be helpless attempting to corner anybody who knew how to operate the panel. I glanced back at Hooper and was surprised at the change in his expression. He had stopped talking abruptly and his face now had an almost crafty look. Instinctively I knew he was no longer telling me the truth and I was puzzled to understand the change.

"Do you know how to operate this panel arrangement?"

He hesitated a moment too long.

"No, sir—that is, I——"

"Does Lord Cecil?"

"I don't think so. You see he would not have——"

"Are there any other passages?"

"I can't explain things in so many words, sir, and I feel a bit weak now. Wait a little while—that's it—wait."

All along I had noticed his eyes on something behind

me, but I thought it was because he wished to avoid my gaze. I spoke quietly and watched him more closely.

"Very well, I will wait. Lie back and get some sleep now. I'll run up and look over it a bit myself."

He sat up in bed with a frightened look on his face.

"Oh, no sir! Not now! You must not do that *now!*"

There was a movement behind me and I wheeled quickly. Edith Lowry was leaning against the frame of the doorway! How long had she been there? How much had she heard?

"So this is the way you obey the doctor's orders, Mr. Riker?"

She seemed mildly amused at my discomfiture.

"I simply stopped in to see how Hooper was."

"And allowed him to talk when he should remain quiet."

My temper and tired nerves flared up wickedly, fanned by the resentment I felt at the fact she always seemed in the thick of the things I did not wish her to be.

"Miss Lowry, if I am not mistaken——"

She stepped closer to me and there was an appeal in her glance.

"Ah, but that is just the trouble. You are mistaken—so terribly mistaken——"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I TURNED back to Hooper. Standing that way, looking into her eyes, was not the best thing in the World for the resolutions I had made with myself for certain further unpleasant duties.

"You will be a lot better before the day is out, old man. Do me the favor of keeping the matters we were discussing to yourself, please."

"Thank you, sir."

Edith Lowry had resumed her place in the doorway.

"If you will excuse me, Miss Lowry, I will run in to town for a little phone call I wish to make."

Her eyes searched mine and she made no move to let me pass.

"Phone call? I didn't know that you——"

She faltered and stopped. Instinctively she had guessed the party whom I intended to call. Perhaps she had feared that right along for some reason as inexplicable as those for other of her thoughts. It gave me a pleasant feeling to think that before the day was out I might lift that mysterious burden off her shoulders. At least I intended to have a go at Burnleigh.

"You are right, my dear, in thinking that I know no other girl in England but yourself. My call is to go

through to that famous place of yours—Scotland Yard."

I heard a gasp from the bed and she stepped quickly to my side.

"Mr. Riker—please—please do not do that!"

"Why not?"

"Because there is no—because you must not!"

"Again, may I ask why not?"

"Lord Cecil would not like that, I know."

There it was! Her first thought of what Lord Cecil would like.

"How do you know that?"

"I just do, that is all."

"But I believe he left things in my hands?"

"But the scandal, Mr. Riker. Oh, please wait!"

"I am sorry, but I have quite made up my mind. Au revoir, Hooper."

"Perhaps it is——"

I finished it for her.

"Exactly, Miss Lowry. Perhaps, and now if you will excuse me——"

I went down into the kitchen and finding a pot of coffee boiling on the stove, I poured myself a cup and snatched a roll. I wanted to avoid breakfast because there was a chance that Burnleigh would come down for it. I was not ready for him yet—in fact I probably would never be ready for that encounter. We had been companions in a way and what I had found out did not agree with any of my memories of him.

Letting myself out the back way I almost tripped over Gloom sitting on the back steps.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Gloom."

"I do not know whether I ever told you, sir, but the name is Glome."

The man had no sense of humor whatever.

"Get the car out. I want to run into town."

"Ah—Lord Cecil said——"

Perhaps he had laid careful plans to keep me a prisoner here. There was no time like the present to find out.

"Never mind what Lord Cecil said and get that car out at once!"

With a sour look he made for the garage. So that there would be no funny business in the garage I followed him. A moment later I was sending it skimming over the road to King's Lynn.

There was a sort of fog blowing in from the sea that was cold and very wet. Everything looked unusually dreary and depressing, but then I was shy a lot of sleep and that can make a big difference in the way things look.

I got Scotland Yard easily enough but from there on my troubles began. The first complication was that no one wanted their assistance except myself—and who on earth was I? Nothing to them of course in comparison to the owner, Lord Burnleigh, and why could I not assure them he wished them to look into matters?

I explained these things as patiently and well as I knew how. Then followed an interval of time devoted to thinking things over. Unfortunately some overly efficient person took advantage of it to look through their files and found the past record of the place That finished it. It was a closed case for them. They could not chase down that old rumor again. Politely enough, but quite firmly they referred me to the local police who could, if they wished, get in touch with the Yard.

I spent the equivalent of a dollar and thirty cents on the call with the net result of being politely told to go chase myself. One thing I had done was to tell them who and where I was. That might help.

On the way back I came quite close to falling asleep at the wheel. Luckily it occurred on the highway and not on that narrow little road along the cliff. When I reached the gates I swung briskly through and continued right on up the drive—through the wood—around the grass grown loop to the very door of the Manor.

The door was standing open just as I had left it the night before and the lights were still burning in the hall. I left them on for the fog was even thicker up here and the old house was dismal enough on the sunniest of days. That was due to the boarding on the windows, of course, and I should order that off today. There was no further use of that precaution.

I went on into the library and switched on the lights there. I also lighted the oil lamp. Slowly but surely I was learning to "do as the Romans do." Then I closed

the library door and coming back to the table I sat in the big chair there and surveyed my surroundings. It was here that the ill-fated Edward had sat and studied. It was from that table that the two books had been stolen —the one about Egyptian architecture and the one about wills. Who would want books like that—especially in a house full of treasures for the collector?

There was a deathly stillness about the place when you were in this room. The sound of the sea seemed more muffled than in any other spot. It was like a tomb. Cheerful thought, and yet that was what the place was supposed to be—the tomb of a tortured spirt. A spirit that moved shoes and took guns and flashlights!

That brought me to the purpose of my visit. I got up and went to the spot where I had pressed my ear the night before. Behind that spot someone had also stood listening. Now to find out how and where it was done. Hooper had said a panel. The possibilities of a panel in the rough plaster were small, but I examined every square inch. The bookcases were more logical.

The lack of sleep was making itself felt in a headache and an almost irresistible drowsiness. In the hopes of easing both I lighted a cigarette and reached for the books to remove them from the shelf. As I withdrew the first hand full I heard the hollow thud of a door being closed somewhere about the house. The sound reverberated and echoed through the old place and then there was an interval of silence.

Then I heard a step that sounded in the hall. It was

coming my way. There was nothing furtive about the step—reluctant perhaps, and slow—but rather honest. I was becoming a connoisseur of footsteps. However, I trusted nothing now, and blowing out the oil lamp I went to the light switch, turned it and stood in the dark with my hand still on it.

Outside the library door the step halted a moment. Then the handle of the door turned and apparently someone was standing on the threshold looking into the darkness of the room. I had a ridiculous feeling that I was being looked over in the inky blackness. Then, cautiously, the step moved toward me. It was someone who knew where the light switch was. I snapped it on and there, in the glare of the lights, Burnleigh stood blinking at me, one hand pressed to his throat.

"For Heaven's sake, Riker! I am too old for tricks like this. What is the idea of lying about in the dark?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I STOOD looking at him steadily for a moment. He had startled me quite as much as I had startled him. I also realized this was not the setting I should have liked for my accusation. He was on familiar ground and probably armed with my gun. Before I spoke I edged closer to the table with its heavy book ends and at the same time realized I was leaving the light switch nearer to him. Then with emphasis I answered him.

"I was lying about in the dark, Lord Burnleigh, because I know now that there is no one that I can trust."

He looked at me rather peculiarly and giving up the strategic position near the light switch came toward me.

"Is it necessary to stand there and glare at me as if I were some sort of a ghost? I followed you here to get an account of your doings since you left me last night with a good night that implied a promise to go to bed."

"How do you know that I did not go to bed?"

He smiled good naturedly. He was confident and cool without a doubt.

"Miss Lowry told me. She was quite upset about it. Quite. I should say it was very complimentary. I told her that I had said good night to——"

"Which good night?"

He looked at me steadily and directly. It took a consumate actor to keep a face as bland as his.

"Which good night? Now which would I——"

Then his voice changed and took on a soothing tone.

"Come on out of here, my boy. I should have kept closer track of you. The place is getting you a bit, I think."

He was not going to get away with *that* kind of thing!

"On the contrary I think I am just beginning to get the place. Would you mind giving me back my gun?"

His mouth opened ridiculously and a frightened look came in his eyes.

"Give you back—what? How would I——"

"The gun you took from under my pillow last night!"

He sank into the chair by the table weakly.

"One of us is certainly crazy. I was not near any pillow last night except my own and as for your gun—what on earth are you talking about anyway, Riker?"

The same voice—even the identical inflection—and he had the nerve to sit there and play the innocent!

"I don't suppose you were near this place last night? I don't suppose you took my flashlight and——"

He raised his hand and pointed.

"Your flashlight is lying right over there unless my eyes deceive me as I am beginning to think my brain is."

Glancing where he pointed I saw my flashlight lying beside the bookcase not five feet from where I had been standing a moment ago. It was odd that he should see

it so quickly when I had been in the room for some time without doing so.

"Odd that I did not see it, but then you should know where you put it."

"*I* put it? Suppose you tell me what on earth you are getting at? I just this moment came in and have not been within ten feet of that spot. At that, how would I get your flash?"

There was no further use of beating about the bush. I might just as well come out in the open and fight it out.

"I don't know what the game is, Burnleigh. As a matter of fact I don't care. This much I do know—no one is going to scare me away from this rotten place until whoever is behind it gets what is coming to them. So far it has been serious enough—one man attacked and dangerously injured—a girl frightened half to death and walking about in a spell—now I have been tacitly told I am next. Believe me, when they touch me they have something more on their hands than just another English victim!"

"But my dear chap, I——"

"Wait until I finish. I just gave you the situation in the abstract and my feelings. To get right down to facts, I happen to know that you came into the room upstairs while I was fool enough to doze off, took my gun and did a lot of other nice friendly little tricks, and then after bidding me good night and Godspeed in no uncertain

tones, you faded into the wall in a way I intend to find if I have to resort to wringing your neck to get it!"

He half rose from his chair literally sputtering protests of innocence.

"Now, don't lie about it. I know your voice when I hear it even in the dark. Why squirm out of it now? If you had wanted to keep your identity a secret why the devil didn't you disguise it?"

He was thoroughly frightened now—in fact there was a real terror in his eyes.

"You heard—*my* voice—here—last night?"

His evident fright gave me confidence.

"That is what I said—your voice—your inflection—your every mannerism. I can even remember your words in case your memory will not carry you back that far. Now then——"

But he wasn't listening to me. He shook as if with a chill, and his eyes were fixed in an unseeing stare. He had shrunk deep into the chair and looked years older. I felt a twinge of pity even under the circumstances.

"Then Hooper must have been right. He said that he saw him in the window—in the wood—but he was young—young and he must be old unless—unless——"

He made an effort to rise and failed. He was so evidently on the verge of some sort of a collapse I stood watching him in wonder.

"For God's sake don't stand there staring at me that way, Riker! Help me—help me! Don't let me go too!

Tell me there are no ghosts—tell me that quickly—tell me——"

"What sort of drool are you talking now, Burnleigh? If you think you can fool me by——"

He was on his knees by the table now trembling as if with the ague. Grasping the edge for support he turned a dead white face up to me and his eyes burned with a dangerous light.

"Fool you! Have you any idea what you have told me just now? You have told me that my younger brother was in that room with you last night. A man who was never seen after he left this place one night. He and I spoke exactly alike even to the small faults in diction! He has been dead for sixteen years or else he is as old a man as I am. Hooper saw him as he was sixteen years ago. Hooper swears he saw him and now you tell me that he spoke to you—spoke to you in the house where I believe he was murdered!"

I was deeply impressed but not entirely convinced.

"Then you mean to tell me that instead of it——"

"Please, please! Get out—go away—leave me alone with this. I'll go on alone—alone until I meet him——"

He tried to rise, and then with what seemed to be the last bit of his energy he sprawled across the table and lay grotesquely twisted and terribly still.

So we had another invalid. After we had put him to bed he lay there limp and silent, barely breathing. Once more we dispatched Gloom for the doctor and once more

Edith Lowry hovered about playing nurse. I remained until I saw that there was nothing more I could do. When I left the room she followed me into the hall.

"Won't you go away from here now, Mr. Riker, and take him where he can be comfortable and happy?"

"Will you come too?"

"If you will go I—yes, I will follow you in a day or two."

I had asked the question as a test but the look in her eyes when she answered shook my firm resolve to stick it out.

"You are too sweet and attractive as a nurse. I would like to wait until it was my turn before going."

She turned quickly and went back into the room. As it happened my turn was not so far distant!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

LUNCHEON was rather a dismal affair. I was lost in thought, planning the afternoon's work. The walls were to come down—that much I could do to satisfy my curiosity even if I never did anything more with Burnleigh Manor. I needed an assistant. It must be someone whom I could trust, and there was no one that would fill the bill. Hooper alone seemed to be "straight." Lowry was the man I ordinarily would want but I had never shaken the memory of those perfectly evident footprints he had failed to report.

However, when we had finished luncheon I asked him to walk down the road with me. It was all to be over soon and I did not intend to allow him out of my sight until it was, so I told him my entire plans and what I hoped to find. When I had finished he made no remark except,

"We will stop at the garage for the tools on the way up."

He was an odd man, and I imagine we were an odd pair as we made our way up the drive toward the Manor, carrying heavy and clumsily wrapped packages. The contents were amusing enough—mine was a heavy sledge hammer and Lowry carried a short, pointed iron bar.

There was not much conversation between us on the way up and what little there was was of a rather grim nature. We both had our minds on the task ahead and the possibility of what we were to find.

We entered the door without a sound, we lighted no light to guide us and we both stopped abruptly in the hall to listen. From somewhere within the Manor came the familiar sound of the mysterious laborer. He had apparently arrived before us and was industriously engaged in whatever task it was he had set for himself—hammer on stone—blow on blow—just as we would be doing in a moment or two.

We stood for a moment or two, listening to the monotonous sound of his unceasing labor—with awe as in the past—but with it came interest as to his location. The sound of the blows seemed to come from far away, to be in the vitals of the old place. For once we had come upon the mysterious inhabitant and his labors unannounced.

I had sketched out a tentative plan with Lowry but it had not anticipated this. I leaned toward him and spoke in a whisper.

"Our friend seems to be ahead of us."

He answered in a whisper. In fact, it seemed to be the most appropriate mode of conversation in this weird house.

"Sounds to me as if someone were trying to break down a masonry wall. What is it really?"

"That is the ghost of Burnleigh Manor, the tortured

soul of the legend, trying to break out of its tomb."

I could see him turn toward me in surprise even through the gloom in the hall.

"But Mr. Riker, you certainly don't put any faith—in——"

I finished it for him.

"Ghosts? Well now, actually why not? What was the man whom you saw at the Lodge that night—the one that vanished without using door or windows?"

"That can be explained without recourse to the supernatural."

It was a relief to stand in that cool, dark hall with the tapping of that ghostly hammer in the distance and hear someone sane enough to frankly repudiate such nonsense.

"Certainly it can and so can this. That is what we have come for but I feel that I should tell you one thing before we go any farther."

"Yes?"

I had wanted to tell him of my suspicion that his daughter was in some way connected with the peculiar happennings at the Manor but I had hesitated and now I felt that in telling him I might lose my last support. However, in all fairness, there was nothing else that I could do.

"What I am about to say is purely suspicion, Lowry, and I want you to take it as such. From the very beginning I have felt that Edith is involved in this thing in some way, against her will. Whatever her connection is, it is so strong that I have been unable to induce her

to tell me what she knows. I wanted you to know my feeling along this line before we go any farther."

Lowry hesitated a second and then his answer came firmly to me through the dusk.

"I would have to have definite proof of that, Mr. Riker, before I would be convinced. Before I left to come up here with you there was a little instance which bears out your theory but which still leaves me unconvinced."

"Could you tell me what it was?"

"Briefly, she begged me not to come up here this afternoon."

"Did she give any reason for her request?"

"As I came past her door in the Lodge I thought I heard her crying and I went in. She was or rather, had been crying until I opened the door but she could give me no reason for it or for her request other than she felt certain that if any of us came up here this afternoon or tonight, something appalling would happen. I am entirely convinced that the peculiarities of the place have played on her imagination and produced a result which you have mistaken for actual knowledge of whatever is happening here behind the scenes."

"All right, let's go."

Without lighting our lights and as silently as we could, we stole along the hall to the stairs. I had placed my foot on the first tread and was about to step on the second, when at my very side came the soft muffled call of an owl. I wheeled about expecting to see Lowry there. I found out at once that he was not at my side and I also

established the fact that he was not within reach of my arm. The sound of the hammer blows had ceased the instant I had heard the call.

I snapped on my flashlight and located Lowry about eight feet behind me. His jaw was set and he was crouched as if to meet an onslaught. I eased his tension by speaking out loud,

"Well, there is no use sneaking about any longer. Our friend has been properly warned of our approach."

Lowry's calm collected voice was a comfort.

"How the devil did they know? We didn't make a sound that I could hear or show a light."

"They?"

"A man doesn't signal to himself, Mr. Riker."

I think this was the first time that I actually took conscious cognizance of the fact that there were two people to combat and yet I had had most positive proof of the dual part in evidence that had occurred before.

I went back to the light switch and snapped it on. I also took the precaution of lighting the oil lamp as well. Then I unwrapped my sledge hammer and picked up the lamp.

"We might just as well go to work now, without worrying about noise. There are two of us and I imagine we are a match for those two grave diggers."

Lowry smiled at me grimly and unwrapped his bar.

"Have you a gun, sir?"

"No."

"That is rather foolish of you. Here, take mine."

He held out a business-like revolver which had probably been his piece in the army.

"Why should I take yours?"

"Never could hit a battleship with one of them but I am a bit handy with a bar like this."

He demonstrated very convincingly with the iron bar, so I tucked the revolver in my side pocket and started for the stairs, carrying the light in my left hand.

"I think we will take a look at the master's bedroom first."

"Why the bedroom?"

"Because I happen to know that there is something worth looking for there."

We went up the stairs in silence. I felt a sort of relief when I had passed up the first few steps, for the nearness of that owl's call to my side puzzled me. From where Lowry stood it might have sounded as if it had come from anywhere. But I knew the one who had given it had been near me at the time without my being aware of it. Before the night was out I hoped to know a good deal more about that, among other things.

We entered the bedroom and found it just as I had left it the night before except that the lights had been put out. I moved the table from the head of the bed to the center of the room, and then placed the oil lamp on it. For at least a half hour after that Lowry and I examined every inch of the walls, pressing this, that and the other things, without avail. We even gave the closet a care-

ful examination. Then we decided we had lost enough time.

"No use searching for the needle any longer. It is time for the sledge hammer now."

Lowry straightened up and looked at the wall with a wry face.

"You are going to find it hard going, sir, and isn't it a shame to wreck the old place?"

"The old place" awoke no fond feelings in my bosom, in fact it was going to be a pleasure to take some healthy "wacks" at it. Then Hooper's remarks came back to me and gave me an idea that seemed to hold promise of accomplishing a lot. I drew Lowry away from the walls, for in here they seemed surely to have ears, and whispered to him.

"Listen to me closely. I have reason to believe that from here a passage in the wall goes down into the library. Now, if our friend is in there and we begin to break through, he will slip out into the library, down the hall and out into the great outdoors. You stay here, talk as if I were with you and smash that wall while I wait down there in the dark to welcome him when he comes out. If you hear a shout drop everything and come down, for to tell the truth, I am still not sure of what my waiting arms will receive."

Lowry's eyes were bright with excitement, but he shook his head and leaning close to my ear, whispered,

"It would be better if you reversed it, sir. Your

voice is the only one they would expect to hear giving directions up here. I'll flatten myself against the wall down there and drop this on the first head that comes out."

He raised the iron bar. So we agreed to break up as soon as I gave the signal, he to steal silently down the stairs and wait in the dark library, while I battered my way through the wall.

Starting from the corner furthest from the door I swung the sledge against the wall, spacing each blow a few inches to the left of the previous one. At the same time I would remark every moment or two to Lowry about something, so that the parting would not be noticeable if anyone were listening to us. It certainly is a creepy feeling, not knowing whether you are seen or heard and not knowing whether there is anyone to see or hear you on the other side of such a mysterious wall.

I had gone perhaps halfway across when the heavy thud of the hammer was suddenly answered by a hollow reverberation from within the wall. I continued on as if it had not been noticed but Lowry and I both stiffened with the realization that we had located a section that at least was not like the rest. What had refused to answer to my knuckles had given up its secret to the heavier impact of the hammer. I gave him the signal to go and he slipped through the door like a ghost himself, and was gone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I CONTINUED my tapping long enough for him to reach the floor below making casual remarks from time to time to the now empty room. When I was sure that he had time to get into place I braced myself and with all the power I could command, I swung the sledge against the spot that had sounded so hollow. The percussion seemed to rumble and roll all about me as if the room were a great drum. Again and again I sent it crashing against the wall, listening each time for Lowry's call. Plaster fell about me to the floor. For a space of about four feet in diameter I had bared the bricks and piece by piece, I was breaking and chipping them. The perspiration streamed down my fact but it was a glorious feeling to be in action, striking back. Everything I had was going into the blows of the sledge and suddenly one brick gave way and crashed down behind the wall somewhere, ricocheted off something and then went tumbling down, down, down through the wall and wound up with a thud far below. With that thud the lights went out. I had touched a sore spot and was to be punished by being plunged into darkness and probably attacked while I was rendered helpless by not being able to see. I had forstalled them this time! Feeble as it was, the oil lamp

gave me all the light I needed, and feverishly, desperately I rained blow after blow at the weakened spot in the wall. Bit by bit the hole grew larger until I could have squeezed into it. Still no sound from Lowry. Tossing the sledge aside I stepped quickly to one side of the hole and flattening myself against the wall well out of reach of anyone on the other side, I shouted as loudly as I could.

"Come on, Lowry! I can get in now! Come on, lift me through!"

My shout had an unexpected answer almost before the last syllable had left my lips. From the hole came a spurt of flame and a deafening report, followed by three more in quick succession. If I actually had put my head in that hole, as my words had indicated, I would have been a dead man now instead of being just half dead from fright. The man who had shot through that hole was a marksman for he had put the lamp out with his first one. I was in pitch black darkness, except for the sharp, white impressions of the spurts of flame that his gun had left on the retina of my eyes. My gun was in my hand before I was conscious of any real volition on my part and leaning forward I answered his fire. I poured three shots into the hole, (or where I was sure it had been before the lights went out). Then I snapped on my flashlight and examined the room. It was filled with powder smoke that stung the eyes and cast a grey pall over everything. The kerosene was leaking slowly to the rug from the riddled lamp, but I was still alone. Then from downstairs I heard Lowry give a shout. It

sounded miles away and seemed to come to me from out of the wall itself.

"Riker—Riker! I've got—Oh!"

Then the house was silent again. I made a dash for the door, sped down the hall and took the stairs two at a time. The lights had been turned out in the hall also and except for the meagre light of my flashlight I was dashing through absolute darkness. I brought up with a crash against the library door. It was closed but not locked. With the expectation of being riddled the next instant I tried to push it open. Someone seemed to be holding it from the inside. Placing my shoulder against it I put all my strength to the task, and at last something moved, gave way and the door flew open. My light showed me an empty room—and then the spot from it found Lowry's body twisted against the bookcase just inside the door. He was on his back, one arm flung over his head, his feet and legs drawn up under him and the iron bar was lying a few feet from his relaxed fingers as if it had been dropped in his fall. His body had blocked my entrance. Blood was flowing from a gash on his right temple. Each breath was a groan and his lips were twisted as if with pain far in excess of that which the cut in his head could produce. I spoke to him but received no answer.

Forgetting the open door at my back I knelt at his side and with my handkerchief wiped away the blood in an effort to see how badly he was injured. I tried lifting him but he was too heavily built for me to manage, espe-

cially in the meagre light that came from my flashlight lying on the floor. Making a crude bandage of my handkerchief I fastened it tightly around his head.

I was almost through when from a point a few feet behind me a flash was turned on and I realized that I was helpless. My own light was lying on the floor beside Lowry just out of my reach, my gun was in my pocket and a move in that direction would probably be fatal, so I crouched motionless in the flood of light waiting for the report that should send me to my ancestors. After what seemed an age (it was probably only a second) I heard the voice that had spoken to me last night in the dark bedroom, except now it seemed to tremble a little with excitement or—with delight.

"Be good enough to do what I say. I have a convincing reason in my right hand and it is only about a foot from your head. I could hardly miss."

I could feel that cold muzzle pointing somewhere in the region of the back of my neck. I wanted to turn and tackle the speaker but I knew to do so meant instant death. The voice went on,

"Put your hands over your head—higher—now stand up. Good! Now turn, slowly, and face my light. If you make the slightest—Riker! Thank God, you're all right! What has happened? What have they done to poor old Lowry?"

I picked up my own light and convinced myself that it was really Burnleigh. Pale and shaking from head to foot he stood blinking at my light. He was such a pa-

thetic sight it never occurred to me that he might be acting the part. I went to the library table and lighted the oil lamp there. While we lifted Lowry and placed him in the chair I told Burnleigh briefly what had occurred as far as I knew. He did not speak until I was finished with my recital.

"Glome told me that you and Lowry had gone out. I worried about it until I could stand it no longer and then started walking out here. Just as I cleared the woods I heard a succession of what sounded like shots, followed by another burst a little later, and then Miss Lowry came running across the terraces and passed me with the entreaty that I hurry to the Manor—that something dreadful had happened there."

So she *had* been hovering about—and now she was running away!

"Where is she now?"

"I think she continued along toward the Lodge."

Lowry stirred in his chair and seemed to be trying to say something. I bent over his moving lips and picked up a word here and there.

"Panel is part of the bookcase—that is why we couldn't find it before—it slid back after—after—the shots. Someone came out—silent—I reached out—terribly dark—caught an arm. We struggled for a moment then they—they hit me. Dirty way of—of fighting——"

I put my hand on his forehead.

"Never mind that, old man, you are all right now."

He moved his head away from my hand impatiently.

"Not all right—never will be all right again, Riker. Know what it was I felt in the dark? It was a woman's arm—cold—clammy—wet—I reached for her hair—look in left hand—some there yet, I think."

Burnleigh had been straining to catch the whispered words too, and we both looked at his left hand. Between the rigidly clasped fingers was a strand of woman's hair, long, black and glossy. Burnleigh shivered and his teeth were clattering.

"Good God, Riker! Cold—clammy—a woman—you don't——"

"Don't what?"

"You remember that Edward said, 'Why can't she rest?'"

I had raised Lowry to a sitting position and he was regaining consciousness rapidly. The cut on his head was not at all serious unless the blow itself had done some damage. The rapidity with which he became himself discounted that possibility.

Burnleigh's attitude irritated me somewhat.

"It would be more to the point, Burnleigh, if you would go get Gloom to help me with things here than to stand stammering cheerful little thoughts like that."

Lowry glanced about him with eyes that held rather a wild look. Slowly he raised his left hand and surveyed the strand of hair. When he spoke his voice was peculiarly soft and under control.

"I will be all right in a moment, Lord Cecil, and I should like to have you hear what I am going to say. I

have already told you it was a woman, have I not? There is only one woman within miles of here and that is my daughter. Mr. Riker told me he was convinced she was involved in this in some way and now I know he was right. I am going to ask you not to be too hard on her. This place has probably driven her crazy as it will all of us if we stay much longer."

I tried to make it easier for him although I was quite convinced who it was that had struggled with him in the dark. I was equally convinced that she had no idea it had been her own father.

"Don't jump to conclusions, Lowry—we aren't sure it was a woman as yet. The dark is deceiving."

"I had my hands on her for a second and I know. This is certainly a woman's hair and it is hair that I recognize."

Then Burnleigh spoke in a voice just barely audible.

"There was one other woman with hair just like that and she lived here long ago."

I looked at him quickly. He was standing rigid, holding on to the table so tightly that his knuckles showed white through the skin of his hand and his eyes had the look of a man who was seeing far beyond the present.

Then from the wall—from somewhere behind the bookcase—came the most unexpected sound of all—the sound of hammer blows on stone. This time they came feverishly, rapidly, as if the one swinging the hammer was working desperately against time, frantically trying to break through that hidden stone wall.

We were instantly galvanized into action. Lowry staggered up to his feet and I turned to Burnleigh,

"Will you steal upstairs, close and lock the bedroom door and come back here?"

He turned instantly and was gone. Lowry had walked unsteadily to the first section of the bookcase and now stood staring at one spot.

"Mr. Riker, look here. Look at this!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

I BENT down to the spot that Lowry was examining so intently and there, protruding out from the juncture of two sections of the bookcase, was a piece of cloth, apparently ripped from a woman's dress! I tugged at it but it would not budge an inch. I realized what it meant—it was a piece torn from the skirt of the woman who had been in this room a moment before and it was caught in the panel through which she had made her escape.

At last we knew where the opening was and we also had been shown its edge. I snatched the iron bar from the floor and began an immediate effort to force it into the crack that must be there just above the piece of cloth. The wood from the bookcase splintered and with each blow of mine, the sound of a hammer on the other side of the wall seemed to become more rapid.

Suddenly my bar went in quite some distance and stuck there. Lowry and I tugged. Burnleigh came in again and he, too, added what strength he could. Snatching up one of the heavy bronze bookends from the table, we gave up our efforts to remove the bar and instead, began to drive it in further. I was amazed at the courage that enabled Lowry to stand on his feet and work. He had

received a blow, both mentally and physically, which would have stopped an ordinary individual.

The bar reached a point beyond which we could not drive it and we then attempted to use it as a jimmy, first one way and then the other, to see if we could get any indication as to how the section of the bookcase swung. Suddenly something gave way and we were all tossed into a heap on the floor. The entire section of the bookcase, almost twelve feet high, had moved into the wall an inch or so where we had been working with the bar.

At the same moment from the opening we had just made, came the crash of masonry falling—stone crashing on stone as if we had broken down a wall as well as forced the section in. This was followed by a wild, exultant laugh. It was clear to me that the short bar we were using had either toppled over a stone and mortar wall or else the mysterious laborer with his hammer had also succeeded in his efforts. It was a bit uncanny having it occur coincidentally with our success in forcing an opening, for if the old legend were to be believed, we probably had freed the spirit!

As soon as I regained my feet I threw my weight against the bookcase door so violently that the books from the shelves showered about us. Lowry came to my aid and without any warning, the whole section swung into the wall, making a two-foot opening into utter blackness. I was about to step into this opening, eager to peer into what had been denied us up until this time when I heard Burnleigh call a warning behind me and I in-

stantly ducked. At the same second from within the wall and to the right of me, there were two spurts of flame and two deafening reports. A splinter of wood from the bookcase struck my left cheek. The shots had been fired not many feet from where my right temple would have been but for Burnleigh's shout. I had drawn back just at the right instant.

Snatching the gun from my pocket I stepped through the opening cautiously and turned to the right. Whoever had fired the shots was gone now for I was alone in an extremely narrow passage. The bookcase formed the door which we had succeeded in opening to its fullest extent and which closed off the passage except to the right. Burnleigh crowded in behind me and I called out hasty directions to Lowry to stand guard on the room side of our new-found door. Together Burnleigh and I swung the bookcase section partly closed and found behind it a stair with precariously narrow treads which led up and away into the darkness, apparently to the bedroom above. The whole affair had a distinctly homemade look to it and whoever had built it had simply taken advantage of the peculiar construction of the massive old walls of the place.

To the right there seemed to be a narrow passage with a steeply declining floor which looked as if it might lead to the cellar. About thirty feet down in this direction, a glance gave me the explanation of the mysterious hammer blows; an open electric light bulb lay on the floor at the end of an extension cord running past my feet, and beside

it lay a sledge, very much like the one I had been using and the floor of the passage was cluttered with broken masonry. In the left wall of the passage there was a jagged hole. There was no trace of the laborer himself but with full knowledge that he must be lurking in the shadows beyond the circle of light from the bulb on the floor, we made our way cautiously down the passage. The floor was slippery and it was with difficulty that we kept our footing. About eight feet from the opening I stopped and whispered to Burnleigh.

"That opening is large enough for a man to squeeze through. There is a possibility that he might be beyond it, waiting for us to pass. You wait here and keep your eye on the hole while I crawl underneath it and see where this passage leads to."

"Be careful! Remember what I told you about the cliff being honeycombed by pirates in the olden days. This wall is probably built directly over some such place and Heaven alone knows where you might wind up."

I dropped to my hands and knees and crawled cautiously past the opening in the wall without making any sound that could be heard on the other side. As soon as I had reached the end of the passage I could come back and investigate the jagged hole. My flashlight made an excellent target out of me but the light was now at my back anyway so I simply had to trust to luck.

The opening was sufficiently far behind me now to permit standing up again and my flash picked out a short flight of steps just ahead. As I went down these I

saw that Burnleigh's guess had been correct. Burnleigh Manor was left behind now and I was walking along quite a roomy tunnel that had undoubtedly been built a great many years before the Manor itself. As I made my way carefully, step by step, I speculated on the direction in which I was going. Inasmuch as there had been no turns I must be walking parallel to the edge of the cliff and not far from it. Then the passage ended abruptly, in a wall into which had been dug deep hand holds and foot holds. After testing it securely, I started up. My flashlight had shown me that it was a short climb of but ten or twelve feet to what appeared at first glance to be solid stone. However, when my head reached the top of this peculiar vertical shaft, I found that I could quite readily push the ceiling up a few inches. Getting a firm grip on the hand holds I pushed upwards with my head and shoulders and was rewarded by seeing daylight. I had opened a rather crude but efficient trap door and I climbed through it. This was how the gentleman of the hammer had made his escape after we had forced our way into his passage.

I was astounded to find that I had come up in the clump of woods where Hooper had been struck down. As a matter of fact, I had come up within six feet of where I had found him lying and now I understood fully what had happened that night. His assailant had come up through this very same trap door and seeing Hooper almost at his side, had felled him, given the owl's call which I heard so close by and escaped as he had come.

I knew that the trap had closed behind me but it had not occurred to me that I would have any difficulty in finding my way back. However, when I decided to go back and aid Burnleigh, sitting back there in the passage, I suddenly realized that I had not the least idea where the opening was. The ground was covered with rocks, all of which looked alike. Frantically I attempted to lift each one in turn and then realizing that I was wasting time, I left the clump of woods and sprinted across the lawn to the house again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

A STOP watch might have shown something interesting in the way of time for my run from that clump of trees to the door of the Manor. Burnleigh was down in that passage waiting for me to return and while I was sure I had found where the mysterious laborer of the Manor had escaped, you could be sure of nothing in this place and it was no time for a man to be left alone.

I sped down the hall to the library and swung through the door. Lowry was at his post and his jaw dropped in amazement at seeing me enter from the door instead of returning down the passage as he expected me to do. His face was white and tense.

"How the dev——"

"Never mind that now, Lowry. I'll explain later. Is everythinng all right?"

"Haven't heard a sound after you called."

"After I what?"

"After you called out something I couldn't hear."

I had not called, so it must have been Burnleigh. Perhaps he had called out for help!

"Lowry we are going to reverse things. You run as fast as you can to the clump of trees by the edge of the cliff out there—where Hooper got hurt—and keep under

cover. Keep your eyes on the ground in the center and drop anybody that comes out."

"But I——"

"For God's sake do what I say quickly. Use your head. I'm going in here after Burnleigh."

I squeezed through the book-case door again and started down the crude passage that had been built between the walls. When I reached the stairs that led down to the old tunnel of the pirates I called out to Burnleigh. No answer!

"Burnleigh—are you all right?"

Still no answer. When I reached a spot about ten feet from the newly made hole in the wall of the tunnel I halted. Perhaps Burnleigh had gone on down the passage after me and was now on the ground above. In that case he was safe.

Something about that jagged opening in the stones of the tunnel wall fascinated me. If Burnleigh had passed it then there was nothing beyond it. I could find out by going back, but I was consumed by a desire to see what lay beyond it. If the ghostly worker had labored so long to open it there must be something worth seeing —but if he were in there——

Then I was chilled to the bone, for I heard a sound as if someone had stumbled over an empty box followed by a whispered imprecation and it had come to me through that opening! What was I to do now? Lowry was beyond call up there in the wood. Burnleigh was—perhaps he was in there!

"Burnleigh, are you in there?"

Utter silence now. If he had gone on through the passage Lowry would have met him by now and one of them would have come back to me. If he had not gone on through the passage he was beyond that black hole now, yet he had not answered me. That meant that he couldn't. Then a plan flashed through my mind that seemed feasible.

I took off my jacket and the chill of the damp ground accelerated the chattering of my teeth. Rolling it into a tight ball I held it firmly in my left hand. Then with my gun in my right hand I dropped to all fours and began crawling along the floor. When I had reached a point directly under the opening I slowly rose to a squatting position, keeping my head well below the lower edge of the broken stones. In this position I waited, listening, for a moment.

From somewhere down the passage I heard the subdued gurgle of trickling water. The sigh of the surf reached me but not a sound came to me from that black circle. Then speaking slowly and distinctly I began raising my left hand with the round ball of my jacket.

"Burnleigh, I am coming in. Give me a hand to get through."

Then I thrust the rolled-up jacket just over the edge of the opening. The instant I had ceased speaking I heard Burnleigh's voice in an agonized cry.

"For God's sake don't do that Riker! Go for——"

There was the sound of a single shot and I heard him

groan. Almost immediately after the one shot, and before I could move or react to his shouted warning, three more shots came. I saw the spurts of flame just over my head and I felt the tug of each bullet in my jacket. If that had really been my head!

Now was my time! I jumped to my feet and thrusting my own gun into the opening I emptied it in the direction that the spurts of flame had told me to shoot. While I was firing, one more shot came from the opening and I felt a red hot pain shoot up my right arm. Once more I dropped to the floor. My arm throbbed and something wet was trickling down it. My shirt stuck to the skin.

I knew I was hit, how badly I could not tell without using my flashlight. I could move my fingers and wrist so at least the bone was not fractured. Then Burnleigh spoke to me in a voice constricted with pain.

"Go for help, Riker. For God's sake go quickly unless—Riker! Are you hurt?"

There was someone else in there interested in that answer so I lied.

"No. Did I——"

Someone was coming down the passage from the library! Good old Lowry—just when we needed him!

"I'm afraid you hit him, Riker. How badly I can't tell here in this dark hole, but if it wasn't pretty bad he never would let me talk to—NO—I'll be quiet! Take your hands off me—take——"

If Lowry would only hurry! I reached for my flash-

light, but my hand was slippery with blood. Then my heart sank and I lay hugging the ground, convinced that my moments were numbered, for from the darkness of that passage, over the soft footfall came the call of an owl! It was answered immediately from within the hole. We were cornered like rats in a hole—Burnleigh, an old man in an uneven struggle beyond the wall, and me with an empty gun and a shot ripped arm.

For a second I was tempted to make a desperate dash for freedom and safety down the other end of the tunnel, where that door opened into the wood. The revulsion from the instantaneous flash of cowardice of my thought brought my courage back. If it was to be a hopeless fight, at least it would be a good one!

Gripping my flash in my left hand I extended it as far from the body as I could and turned it on. In its brilliant beam, actually dazzling after the utter darkness of the last few moments, stood Edith Lowry!

Her face was dead white—her lips drawn into a thin tight line—and her eyes were unnaturally bright and wide. She did not flinch before the light but came slowly on toward me.

"Who is that with the flashlight?"

I could hardly answer her.

"Riker, and I have a gun in my other hand. Please do not——"

"Put your gun away, Mr. Riker. I will handle matters my own way from now on. There have been enough guns."

I scrambled unsteadily to my feet utterly oblivious to the position of the opening. There was something about her that I had never seen before—something that compelled obedience. I never guessed the desperation that lay beneath her cool exterior.

She went directly to the hole.

"Are you in there?"

I thought it was Burnleigh that answered.

"Yes—but I am afraid—afraid—I am done in."

I saw her shudder. She reached down and took the flashlight out of my hand. Leaning through the opening she sent its beam through. I got a glimpse over her shoulder and threw an arm about her waist as she sagged back against me. Her nerve had broken at the sight beyond that hole in the wall, and well it might.

I spoke to her softly and firmly.

"Don't let yourself go, Edith. Hurry and tell your father to come as quickly as he can. I will do what I can in the meantime. Quickly now! He is in the wood just above us."

She straightened up and as her footsteps died away up the passage I heard her sob.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

IN THAT glance over her shoulder I had seen a small room about twenty feet square with a peculiarly domed ceiling. Against the wall to the right Burnleigh had been lying on his back, arms flung wide—terribly still. On his knees at Burnleigh's side, and supporting himself with one arm against the wall, was a man I had never seen before. In that second's glance it seemed as if he were a younger and better looking Cecil Burnleigh—almost as if he were the departing spirit of the man lying at his knees. His shirt front, dirty and ragged, had been one mass of crimson. His hair had been awry and from it in a streak down one bearded cheek had been a stream of blood. Then her light had gone out and I had taken it from her relaxed fingers.

Now as I lifted myself through the hole, the pain of my own bleeding arm was forgotten. The end of the road had been a bloody one, but I knew that the fight was over. Once in the room I turned the flashlight on. It showed me the pain distorted face of the kneeling man. His eyes were wild and shifting, as if an insane mind lay behind them. He made a hopeless effort to rise and when he opened his lips I heard Burnleigh's voice!

"Is that you, Riker?"

"Yes."

"Well, by God, if you think you are——"

One hand reached around behind him.

"I have come to help. I don't know who you are, but you are badly hurt, and so is Lord Cecil there. Be sensible and——"

"Sensible Hell! No one is going to steal it from me again! Not while I have a——"

He suddenly pitched forward on his face and with a twitch was still. As he fell a gun slipped from his fingers and clattered on the stone floor at my feet.

I stood my flashlight on end so that its light would reflect from the ceiling and knelt at Burnleigh's side. He was breathing easily but there were bruises at his throat where the collar had been torn away and the thin hair on the back of his head was matted with blood. The wound there was merely a surface cut and my hasty examination told me that if the shock of it all had not been too much, he would be all right. Making him as comfortable as possible I turned to the man with the burning eyes and the voice so like Burnleigh's.

Rolling him over on his back I was shocked to see that he was young—about my own age although the scrubby growth on his chin made him look older. I ripped open his shirt and one glance told me all that I needed to know. He could not have far to go. There were two bullet wounds in his breast, one in the side of his neck and a

groove along the side of his head where one had grazed him. His breath came in gasps and his hand was cold as ice. I heard Lowry's voice in the hall.

"Coming, Riker! Where are you?"

A second later he was in this wierd room.

"Good God, Riker! What has happened?"

I told him quickly. Before I had finished I heard Burnleigh's voice, weak and trembling.

"Riker—are you—are you all right?"

I knelt at his side.

"Fine! You will be all right in a little while."

"The boy—how is he—dead?"

"No, but I don't believe it will be very long."

From the other side of the room came a sob and we all glanced quickly in that direction. Edith Lowry stood with her back to the wall, looking at us with frightened eyes. Then with one quick movement she crossed and knelt at the side of the still figure with the crimson shirt. Burnleigh whispered to me.

"In my inside breast pocket—green bottle—give it to her!"

I reached in as he directed and pulled out a small glass phial. When Edith Lowry removed the stopper the pungent odor filled the room. Holding the bottle under the nose of the man at her feet she allowed the gasping breath to draw in the stimulating vapors. After a moment his eyes fluttered open.

The wild light was gone—the burning fever back of

them had passed. Now they were tired and bewildered. They rested on the girl's face bent over him, and his lips made a desperate effort to smile.

"Thanks old dear for—for all—the help. You were mighty sporting with me even after I—after I cracked up. I did crack up in the head a bit—didn't I?"

She smiled at him but there were tears in her eyes. His voice went on getting weaker all the time.

"I do not really—mind—going now. I found her—I am—so glad—for that. Don't let them talk about her —please—she was too sweet—too sweet—bury all three of us—together—and let it go at—that."

His voice died away and his head drooped. Gently I lifted her to her feet and held her close to me. She was trembling from head to foot.

Burnleigh's voice broke the silence, very gently and very kindly.

"Who was he, my dear?"

Without moving away from me she answered him.

"He was the son of Robert Burnleigh, your brother."

"And of Lady Burnleigh, my other brother's wife?"

Her answer was barely audible.

"Yes."

"I thought as much. Poor chap."

Burnleigh was on his feet now and Lowry had laid his coat over the prone figure on the floor. With her hands over her face, and her head against my shoulder, Edith went on speaking.

"I followed the footsteps that day to the Manor and I

caught him there. He—he begged me to listen to him and then he told me who he was. When he became of age they gave him a letter his mother had left for him in case anything happened to her. You see he was born and lived in Egypt. In the letter she told him of the stone in the wood, and of two books that she would leave for him in the library if she could. Those books would tell him where to look for the heritage that was rightfully his. Instead they led him—to—her body."

I glanced quickly about the room. It was cluttered with odd shaped boxes and bundles. Here was the priceless Egyptian collection of Edward Burnleigh that had so mysteriously disappeared! Mummy cases stood in the shadowy corners and one especially large one lay on the floor with a grinning little figure carved from ivory squatted on top of it.

Her voice went on seeming to find relief in the telling.

"I went with him through the passage and we found the books. He begged me to help him find his mother. I brought him food and he lived here. That was why there were no footprints going back again."

Lowry moved toward her but I waved him back. Her trembling had ceased. It would be better to get it all out of her mind.

"In one of the books it told of this room but the directions were not exactly right. He had a hard time finding where to begin. When Edward built the Manor he found these old tunnels from the days when the pirates used it for a hiding place. He built the crude en-

trance through the wall and the stairs down to this place, and in later years used it for a hiding place for his treasures. This room was used by the old pirates to hide their loot and at one time it had an opening in the roof through which they lowered it. It was all in the book."

That explained the construction of the roof and you could see where the opening had been.

"He lived down here in the dark—searching—searching all the time. We used the owl call to identify ourselves to each other. Then the solitude and the darkness drove him mad. He threatened to kill my father if I did not help him. He meant to kill Hooper, I think. My life was one long nightmare. I did not dare tell and I thought I could hold everyone off until he found what he was looking for and left the Manor. He wanted to kill Mr. Riker, but I told him if he harmed anyone else I would tell at once. Then he threatened me. He was insane—hopelessly so—I—I was frantic."

She was trembling again and my arm tightened about her to reassure her. Burnleigh's voice cut in on us.

"Riker! Under that image there—on that long case —is a piece of paper. Will you—will you—look at it?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

EDITH stepped back and glanced in the direction Burnleigh was pointing. For some reason my feet had become reluctant to move and the air in the room seemed to be getting frightfully close.

"When you left me he called to me and helped me into this place. He was about to lead me over there when you came back. Then he threatened to kill me if I warned you in any way."

I had reached the side of the long mummy case. It was different than any I had ever seen before in the museums in that it seemed to be double. It was plain, too, without the carving and painting of the others that stood about in disarray.

I looked closely at the little image. The vague light of the flashlight had deceived me. Instead of the grinning, typical figure of a pagan god, I saw a finely carved figure with a face peculiarly beautiful. Under it lay a sheet of parchment, stiff, and covered with a transparent waxy film. Lifting the god I drew it out gently and, going back, I knelt beside the light on the floor. Edith stepped toward me quickly.

"You are hurt! There is blood on your hand—on your shirt and arm. I did not notice before—please——"

I reassured her and as a matter of fact it no longer

pained me. As soon as the grim business of the moment was done it could be dressed. Burnleigh stood oddly rigid and his words came with an effort.

"Read it, Riker. Read it so we can all hear."

And turning the parchment toward the beam of light I read the words on its yellowed surface.

"Beneath this parchment lie the bodies of my brother Robert and my wife. I killed them. To you who receive that with bitterness I say that there is no punishment that you in your anger could inflict—no agony of retribution more infinite than that through which I have passed. They died in each other's arms and as they died I have laid them to rest, their bodies preserved against all time. That much I could do for their dust. I shall follow them shortly and knowing that my vision is clear of all pretense. I was an old man, buried in the past of a great people. My every waking thought was with that splendid race whose symbols lay about this room. He was young, and handsome and I know now, a good man. She was beautiful beyond description. No man could look on her with safety. The thrust of a knife can still life but it cannot harm a love as great as theirs. For that I am grateful even though I am conscious I could never grasp its true greatness. What I have done will haunt me forever. For me there is no peace. You who look on them, do this for me and for the sweetness of the bond that binds them even in death—cover

them against the cold of the earth and leave them in peace. As I had sealed this their room, seal it again and keep faith with the dead. Life takes on the darkness of the tomb for him who has lost the light of love.

EDWARD B."

In the moment or two we stood there in silence it seemed to me that the passions and hopes of these people long since dead eddied and swirled about us like wisps of smoke. The Manor had yielded its secret at last and with it the bitter sweet story of the parents of the boy at my feet. What was it he had said? "—bury the three of us together and let it go at that——"

I motioned to Lowry and he slipped quietly through the opening to the tunnel beyond. Then without a word I lifted Edith in my arms and careful to keep most of her weight on my good left arm I passed her through to her father. Then I turned back to Burnleigh.

"Go ahead if you wish to, Riker. I am going to stay here a bit longer."

I did not like the look in his eyes.

"Things will look a lot different in the sunlight and you are hurt, too. Let me help you."

I forced him toward the opening.

"I think I should like to have them all sleep together, Riker, and their story with them."

"Lowry and I will see to that later."

And once more we made our way up that ancient old tunnel of the buccaneers to the library. When we reached the hall, Lowry met us and with a peculiar look on his face.

"You and Lord Cecil just walked up the passage, did you not?"

"Yes—why?"

"Because I heard footsteps—odd ones—as if they were in the hall here with me."

And the ghostly footsteps of the Manor became the homely echoes from the tunnel. Later, sitting on Hooper's bed, I had the confirmation.

"The night of Lord Edward's death I found the trap door in the woods, Mr. Riker. I had gone along that dark tunnel for quite some distance when I heard a shot fired somewhere ahead of me in the darkness. I ran back to the wood as fast as I could, and I have been haunted by the thought ever since that my footsteps made him—made him wish to die."

There were tears in the old man's eyes.

"It had to come sooner or later, Hooper."

"That day you caught me on my knees in the wood I was trying to find it again. I thought I could——"

Lowry had entered the room behind us.

"Mr. Riker, my daughter asked me to send you down to her. She is waiting to dress that wound in your arm."

Perhaps there was evident eagerness in the way I started for the door. At any rate there was an amused smile on his face.

"She said something about it being your turn at last——"

But I was taking the steps two at a time. There was a lot I had to say to Edith Lowry.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

A SOFT wind was blowing in from the sea, and with it came the sun-drenched, full blossomed odor of Summer. The long sleek Rolls made its way slowly along the road that skirted the cliffs, its chauffeur speculating on the condition of the clay road in the event of rain. On the back seat, robes about their knees even in the heat of the day, sat two white haired old men. Their heads nodded with the lurching of the car as if they were dozing, but their eyes were wide awake and fixed keenly on the bend in the road ahead of them.

"I still say I don't like the idea of your coming back, Lord Cecil."

"Hooper, as you grow older you get fussier and fussier. If it were not for the fact that I can never find anything unless you are about I'd consider pensioning you."

"It isn't fussines, sir, it is a moral issue with me of a sort."

"Moral?"

One lurch of the car was more violent than the others and from the front seat came a respectful,

"Sorry, sir."

Hooper recovered his balance and his dignity and went on.

"Yes, sir. The Manor is always Burnleigh Manor to me. I told you it was a sacrilege to sell it and now to think of going in there and seeing a fat common American Millionaire squatted on the terrace makes my heart ache."

"It may not be as bad as you think."

"It couldn't help being, sir. That is ground sacred to the feet of a Burnleigh. American dollars and American coarseness——"

"Yes, yes, Hooper. I have heard all that so many times before. Not again, please. Give this one American millionaire a chance. He has owned it now for six months. Suppose you wait until you see what he has done in that time before you condemn him and his race?"

Again the car gave a wicked lurch.

"Well, he hasn't done much with the old road, and how do you know we will be welcome now?"

"Oh, Hooper, be still."

"But I hear these Americans are an uncouth race and suppose we come to his house—your house I still say—and he hasn't the politeness to——"

"Hooper, *will* you be still!"

"Yes, but I first want to——"

"Besides fussiness, your old age is showing up in garrulousness. The repression of your seventy-two years seems intent on pouring out in the few remaining ones left!"

Hooper sank back into his corner sulkily.

"We will probably see an American flag hanging out of every blooming window."

"Well, what of that? You haven't owned a British one, let alone having enough pride to hang it out."

"Yes, but I——"

"Never mind—never mind! I am too weary to talk any more."

The car halted at the big wrought iron gates. The halt was a mere formality for they stood wide open. Beyond them stood the Lodge—surrounded by banks of gorgeous flowers—and topped by fresh paint that made it glisten.

From the door of the Lodge came a man with white hair and a close-clipped white moustache. True, he leaned a bit heavily on a cane but his back was proudly straight and his teeth flashed in a smile.

"How do you do, Lord Cecil? My daughter has prepared some tea and biscuits for you after your long——"

But Burnleigh was half out of the car.

"Lowry! Bless my heart and soul! What——"

Then catching himself and with a sly twinkle in his eye he bowed toward the man with the white moustache.

"That was very thoughtful of you, Lowry. I make it a practice never to eat at night, but the tea will taste delicious."

From the interior of the car came Hooper's voice.

"But it isn't night, sir? It's broad day——"

Lowry and Burnleigh laughed heartily.

"Yes, Hooper, it is daylight, and we will eat shortly. You see, Lowry, he is getting so old that his memory will not carry him back to that night we——"

From the car came Hooper's voice again.

"Old? I say! Why I am only a year older than——"

The car wound its way up the drive through the wood, Burnleigh, Lowry and Hooper across the back seat. At the edge of the wood Burnleigh leaned forward with a gasp.

"Oh—just as it was—how could he know about those reds in that bed there—and the yellows there—Hooper! There is Burnleigh Manor as it was—years ago—even to the color of the lawn!"

"Every lawn is the same color. What else could the fellow——"

"Every lawn is not the same color. Your eyes are getting too old to tell the difference, that's all."

"Old? My eyes are not one bit——"

"Never mind—never mind, Hooper. We are not interested."

The gravel crunched under the wheels as the car came to a stop at the great front doors. A man was waiting to open the door and beside him stood a little girl about seven years old, scrubbed and starched to the last degree. She dropped a little curtsy and spoke to the three men.

"Welcome to Burnleigh Manor. Mother and father said to tell you that the lock has not been changed and I have a key to give to Lord Cecil, which they hope he will always keep."

Burnleigh got out and took it from her, blowing his nose with peculiar intensity at the same time. She glanced at him shyly and all signs of party manners left.

"Are you really and truly an English Lord?"

From the door of the Manor came a burst of laughter. Burnleigh glanced up.

"Riker! It is gorgeous—simply gorgeous! What will you sell it back to me for?"

From the interior of the car came Hooper's voice.

"Mr. Riker!—Lord Cecil! I thought you told me it was an American millionaire?"

Burnleigh turned back with a smile.

"I did and it was the truth. Now are you satisfied with the sale?"

"Of course, but only because of his English—er—education."

"And now, Hooper, for the big surprise. Meet Mrs. Riker—the present Lady Burnleigh!"

From the depths of the back seat came a snort, but the voice that followed it was a bit breathless.

"Surprise? Any poor fool would have known that he was——"

"Never mind—never mind Hooper, we are not interested. Get out and see to the baggage or you will be fussing all the rest of the day at the way it was handled. Edith, take me in and show me what you have done with the inside."

THE END

The Editors of the Mystery League in introducing in the following pages Gwen Bristow and Bruce Manning, collaborators in THE INVISIBLE HOST, *their next selection, do so with an assured belief that in these two young American authors they have discovered writers who in years to come will rank with the recognized leaders in this field of fiction.*

What would YOU *do if you had been invited by telegram to a party to be given in your honor and signed "your host," only to find, when you had arrived at a penthouse nineteen stories above the city's streets, that you were in the presence of seven acquaintances whom you disliked intensely—your arrival being followed by an announcement from the radio in the room that the entire group would be dead by morning unless you were able to outwit your unseen host.*

Coupled with this most ingenious plot is a high standard of craftsmanship that makes its suspense grip the reader from the initial page—and your editors doubt that once begun it will be possible for any reader to lay the book down.

You are strongly urged to reserve this book at your United Cigar Store or Whelan Drug Store NOW, *so that you may be sure of obtaining your copy.*

THE INVISIBLE HOST

By

Gwen Bristow and Bruce Manning

CHAPTER ONE

"THAT makes thirty-seven words," said the girl.

"Will you read the telegram again?" came the voice over the wire.

She read: "Congratulations stop plans afoot for small surprise party in your honor Bienville penthouse next Saturday eight o'clock stop all sub rosa big surprise stop maintain secrecy stop promise you most original party ever staged in New Orleans. Signed, Your host."

"That's correct. Send the message to each of the eight addresses."

"The eight telegrams," said the girl, "will cost three dollars and thirty-six cents."

Thirteen quarters and three nickels bonged and clinked into the coin-box. "Thank you," said the girl.

From the other end of the line she heard the click of the receiver.

"Gee," she remarked to the girl at the next telephone, "but that guy had a spooky voice."

"Maybe he's an undertaker."

"No, he's having a party," she answered, as she punched out the message on the keyboard before her.

Fifteen minutes later eight yellow envelopes were briskly on their way toward their eight destinations.

Mrs. Gaylord Chisholm tore open her yellow envelope with slim aristocratic fingers and read the message twice. A puzzled line came between her eyebrows, then she smiled amusedly.

Under the pale lights of her boudoir Margaret Chisholm had the air of one of those ancient queens whose sculptured profiles look disdainfully down upon posterity. There was a gesture of empire in the very way she touched a flame to the end of her cigarette and held up the telegram to read it again through the blue plumes of smoke.

"Congratulations stop plans afoot for small surprise party in your honor Bienville penthouse next Saturday eight oclock stop all sub rosa big surprise stop maintain secrecy stop promise you most original party ever staged in New Orleans.

Your host."

What a silly telegram—and yet it was rather clever, thought Margaret. Somebody appeared to be challenging her own position as originator of the city's most amusing parties. Margaret smiled and considered.

Of course it was not necessary to explain to anyone

acquainted with the social rivalries of the city that Mrs. Gaylord Chisholm really deserved congratulations for the calm fashion in which she had placed the stamp of her disapproval on the season's only questionable débutante by omitting Catherine Slamon from the list of guests at her annual débutante ball. It was curious, Margaret had reflected afterwards, how much of an impression that had made. The state of society had become appalling; a few years ago nobody would have dreamed of accepting the daughter of an Irish politician into the heart of the Mardi Gras festivities, no matter how rich and philanthropic her heavy-jowled father might be. But everybody had accepted her, and she had danced gayly through Carnival until the night of the Chisholm ball. Margaret had discussed it beforehand with Jason Osgood, whose daughter was also a débutante that year. The result had been that when the guests arrived at Margaret's famous ball for the season's débutantes, Catherine Slamon had simply not been there.

And so it was that at the party Saturday night, Margaret told Dr. Murray Chambers Reid that she had thought he was the sender of the telegram, congratulating her on her successful snub of the Slamons. Dr. Reid was too consciously blue-blooded not to admire Margaret for that; and besides, Margaret informed Dr. Reid lest he feel too flattered, the wording of the telegram had sounded to her like a savant's effort to be facetious.

That was what Margaret was to say Saturday night. For the present she simply folded up the telegram and

laughed to herself as she screwed her cigarette in a bowl of sandalwood cinders.

Dr. Murray Chambers Reid carefully pushed back the pile of university records on his desk and tore open the telegram his secretary had brought in.

Much of Dr. Reid's reputation in the cool academic circles where he was reverenced was due to the fact that he never gave the impression that he was being told something for the first time. He glanced at the telegram and glanced up to say "No answer, Miss Ashmere," but as the door closed behind her his face relaxed into an enigmatic frown.

"Congratulations stop plans afoot for small surprise party. . . ."

Of course, Dr. Reid knew it had been rather clever of him to have young Henry Abbott quietly retire from the faculty when Abbott showed an unmistakable tendency to preach subversive social theories in his classes. But very few persons knew why young Abbott had left the university after so short a time; and one really didn't proclaim the inner creakings of a great institution by celebrations. Only two or three special friends of the university had found excuse to congratulate Dr. Reid on the efficiency with which he had once more cleared its corridors of turbulent doctrines. These were men who knew the good work he was doing, such as Jason Osgood.

And so when he arrived at the party Saturday night, Dr. Reid was to tell Jason Osgood in an aside why he had thought Mr. Osgood had sent the telegram. He was to add that he had thought it a wise precaution on Mr. Osgood's part to sign himself simply "Your host," so as not to give the inquisitive an inkling that it was Jason Osgood who had endowed the chair of economics and who took a fatherly interest in what was taught from it.

Dr. Reid was to say all that Saturday night. He knew it now as he put the telegram into his breast pocket and rang for his secretary. Dr. Reid easily made up his mind in advance.

As his secretary flounced through the door, Jason Osgood, annoyed at having a wire interrupt him at this time, frowned impatiently, pushed aside his report to the stockholders and tore open the envelope of the third telegram.

At the party Saturday night Mr. Osgood was to charge Peter Daly with sending the telegram. He was to explain how exasperated he had been upon receiving it—it was not soothing to be interrupted in his office by cryptic messages from artistic youngsters of the French Quarter. Still, Mr. Osgood was to say, he had reflected that it had been rather important to have financed the Civic Forum, and he hadn't been surprised that Peter had planned to celebrate the Osgood Foundation. "Then, of course," Mr. Osgood was to add, "I wanted to congratu-

late you on having your book dramatized on Broadway. So I decided to run up for awhile after a meeting in my office."

That was what Mr. Osgood was to say Saturday night. Now he read the telegram, and put it aside as he turned back to his report. Mr. Osgood's office was in the shining new Bienville Building, but he had not yet had a look at the penthouse, twenty-two stories above the street. He remembered that the architects had said it would be the smartest thing of its kind in town.

Peter Daly had been browsing among the bookshops along Royal Street, and found his message on the mantelpiece when he came in. He deposited a newspaper-wrapped bundle of books on the floor and opened the fourth telegram.

"It took me three full minutes to decide on the sender," Peter was to report at the party Saturday night, "but after running down the list of my friends I remembered Sylvia, and I was certain it was she. You see, Sylvia was always a pal of mine—she used to read my stuff and say it was good back in the days when I hardly believed it was good myself, and it seemed just like Sylvia to want to give me a party during these first days back home. I suppose I was a little bit silly—seeing one's first play on Broadway usually does go to one's head."

That was to be Peter's explanation Saturday night. But now when he read the telegram he simply went out on his balcony and looked down over the strange dilap-

idated beauty of the old French Quarter and listen to the chime of bells in the dust-gray cathedral tower.

"Telegram, Miss Sylvia."

"Thanks, Chad." Sylvia Inglesby lifted her sleek golden head to look at her office boy, and smiled in spite of herself. "Chad, how often have I told you not to chew gum in the office?"

"Oh gee, Miss Sylvia, I'm sorry." He fished a slip of paper from the wastebasket and wrapped up the gum. "That all right?" he asked as he put the ball back into the basket.

"Yes, I suppose so. And Chad, tell Miss Worthington to have those briefs ready by five o'clock. Mr. Lindsay will be in then."

"Yessum." Chad's head bobbed and he grinned at her as he went out.

Sylvia smiled after him as she slipped her fingers under the flap of the fifth telegram. She took a foolish delight in the adoration of the office boy as being a typical tribute to how much and yet how little she looked like a lawyer.

Her face lit again with amusement as she read the telegram. "Congratulations. . . . Your host."

"But it was so exactly like you, Tim," she was to whisper at the party Saturday night.

Sylvia was an admirable lawyer, logical and coldly inspired. There were several of her clients who had become in the course of time her warmest friends, and

perhaps the closest friend she had among them was Tim Slamon, the politician whose bulbous pugnacious face belied his very real intellect. Sylvia was fond of Tim.

"But I wondered at the time," Tim was to hear her say Saturday night, "if it was wise of you to celebrate with a party. Of course it was a triumph for us both when we managed to adduce proof that Cosgrave was legally entitled to run for mayor after all the mud slung by Osgood's faction. I couldn't help thinking it was good of you to give me a party."

Sylvia was thinking about that Osgood-Slamon battle as she tucked away the telegram. She knew her methods there had smacked considerably of the shyster. She did not think she would have strained so many points for anybody but Tim. Good old Tim.

It was characteristic of Tim Slamon that he never chewed his cigars. As he came back to his office on his return from City Hall the blue smoke enwreathed his head till he looked like one of a race of funny Celtic genii advancing in a cloud.

Two telegrams lay on his desk. The first proved to be a message from one of the out of town directors of the Art Craftsmen's Club thanking Mr. Slamon for his public-spirited work in getting the Craftsmen's Club an appropriation from city funds. Tim read it and put it aside with a benign nod. He approved of the Craftsmen's Club. Not that he had ever had time to learn much about pictures, pottery and sculpture, but it was run by

an amusing group and its school had achieved a reputation that a civic leader of Tim's caliber could not overlook. Young Abbott, reflected Tim, had probably nudged the board of directors and suggested this telegram of thanks. Abbott was a nice fellow, in spite of his recent mysterious elimination from the university faculty after a teaching career of four months; and he would naturally be interested in the welfare of the Club, for he had just been awarded first prize in their spring exhibit.

Tim opened the other telegram.

Meeting young Abbott on Saturday night, Tim was to explain that he had thought Abbott must have sent the congratulating telegram. It had seemed so obviously the work of a harebrain like Abbott. "I thought you were trying to be mysterious, and it seemed rather fun to fall in with you," Tim said. "I thought I'd just come as directed and pretend I had no idea who the host was and be surprised when you confessed over the cocktails."

Tim reflected as he put aside the telegram that it was a good thing he had had long experience in learning how to please everybody.

Henry L. Abbott, known in the lopsided familiarity of the Quarter as Hank, sat in a palmy patio on Royal Street painting the crooked stairway that led to the balcony when the ancient negress who kept his apartment in order brought him the seventh telegram. She jabbered in her soft, pleasant and unprintable Creole patter that

it had just arrived. Hank, who never understood more than half she told him, said "All right." As she retreated he leaned over and studied the dask of blue he had put into the shadow on the stair. It seemed too blue. Hank knew considerably more about painting than he did about communism; in fact, he was given to wondering what he had said in his classroom lectures that had sounded communistic to Dr. Reid. He frowned over the blue shadow and tore open the telegram.

He read it several times, chuckling. Hank had been in particularly good humor since he had won the prize at the spring exhibit.

"Jean," said Hank to the blue-shaded stairway. "Jean."

At the party Saturday night Hank was to confess to Jean that she was the only possible sender of the telegram who had occurred to him. "It had such a Hollywood flavor," he was to say. "And it seemed so like you to remember in the midst of your flashing career that I had won a bit of a prize myself."

Hank stuffed the telegram into his pocket and returned to his survey of the shadow on the blue stairway.

But Jean, beautiful, misty, diaphanous Jean Trent of the talkies, back home in New Orleans on a holiday, said that she did not think about Hank when she received the eighth telegram. She said Saturday night that as soon as she had read it she had thought about Margaret Chisholm.

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